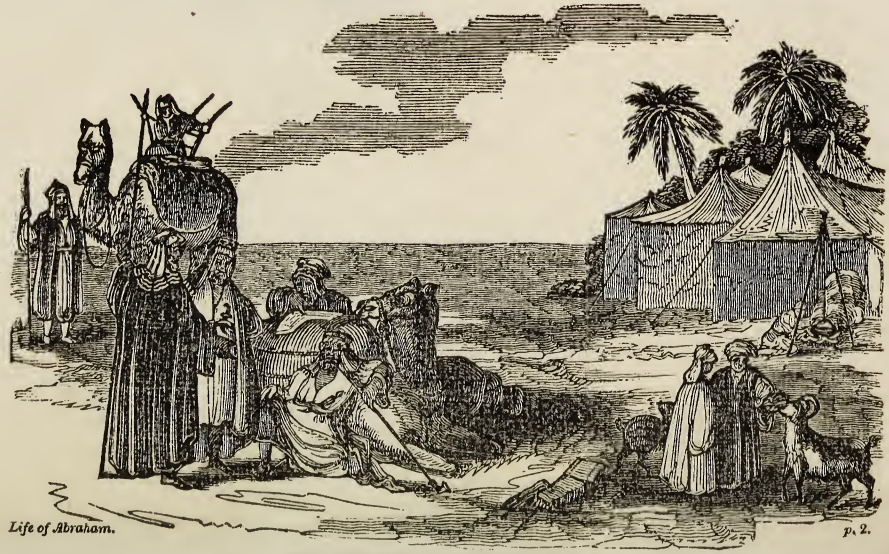

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ENCAMPMENT OF BEDOUIN ARABS.

THE

LIFE OF ABRAHAM.

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LIFE OF ABRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

Description of Chaldea—The Chaldean shepherds some of the earliest astronomers—They fall into idolatry—Birth of Abraham—His call to forsake Chaldea—His faith and obedience—Goes to Mesopotamia, accompanied by several of his relatives—His father Terah dies—A second call—Abraham and Lot go westward—Description of the country to which they arrive—They pitch their tents near Shechem—Description of Shechem—Altars and sacrifices.

THERE is a large, level country in Asia, which was formerly called Chaldea. It is now a part of *Turkey in Asia.* This country had a very fertile soil, which produced abundance of vegetation. The climate was warm, and except during a very short period of the year, when it suffered by hot winds from the distant deserts of sand, was soft and delightful. It was inhabited by what is called a *pastoral people.* By a pastoral people we mean those who live in tents, and keep large flocks of sheep and goats, and large numbers of cattle and camels.

The great plain of Chaldea had rich pastures, where the grass grew very luxuriantly. Thousands of cattle were scattered over these green pastures. The gentle shepherd led his flocks and herds into these fertile fields, and they drank from the running streams, and lay down upon the soft carpet formed by the green grass.

These shepherds were in the habit of spending many of their nights in the open air. The heavens were calm and serene, the stars shone with peculiar beauty, and the pleasing stillness of night invited their minds to meditation. Thus they were led to study the motions of the heavenly bodies,* and became some of the earliest astronomers in the world.

Such pleasing studies should have made them pious and devout, for what is there that shows more clearly the power and wisdom of God than the beautiful starry heavens? These stars and planets are suns and worlds that move along in their orbits, or paths, with wonderful order and regularity. When King David, who had also been a shepherd, viewed them, he was led to praise and adore the

* Stars and planets are called *heavenly bodies.*

great Being who made them. He also saw his own littleness amid the immensity of God's works. "When I consider the heavens," says he, "the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, what is man, that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou visitest him! Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honour, and hast placed him over the works of thy hands."

But the Chaldean shepherds fell into idolatry, and began to worship the stars instead of HIM who made the stars. This senseless star-worship was one of the first methods by which the descendants of Noah forsook God.

Among the people I have been describing, there was a man named Abram, or, as he was afterward called, Abraham. He is supposed to have been born in the year of the world two thousand and eight, which was only two years after Noah's death. We do not know whether Abraham ever fell into the sin of idolatry, but we are told that "his fathers served other gods beyond the flood," that is, beyond the river Euphrates, where they lived. If Abraham was ever led into

this sin he did not continue in it, but became a worshipper of the true God. Probably there were some persons who maintained the true religion, which they had received from God through Noah. By means of these persons he might have learned the right way, although, as we have already seen, Noah died a little before Abraham was born.

God saw that Abraham was a man capable of doing a great deal of good in the world, and he determined to employ him in very important services. But he was exposed to very great temptations. The people around him were most of them idolaters. We all know how much people are influenced by the company they keep. If they associate with the wise and good, their wisdom increases and their piety brightens; if with people of pleasant and easy manners, they become courteous and refined; but if they associate with profane, wicked, and clownish people, they are liable to be led into the same evil courses. Perhaps Abraham's virtue was strong enough to withstand these temptations, but they might destroy his children. God saw this, and did not wish him to bring up his family among such wicked people;

he therefore determined to send him to another country, where he would no longer be disturbed by his wicked relations.

We are told in the Bible, that while Abraham lived in Ur, a city of Chaldea, the *God of glory appeared to him.* How he *appeared* to Abraham we do not know. Sometimes God appeared to the patriarchs and prophets in *visions;* at other times in a *voice* from heaven; and at others he made a *secret impression upon their minds.* Whether he did it in one way or the other, it was done in such a manner that they knew it was God who addressed them. We should think, from its being said, *the God of glory appeared to* Abraham and *spoke to him,* that he saw some very *bright and glorious appearance,* and that God addressed him in a *distinct voice.* The direction which he gave was, "GET THEE OUT OF THY COUNTRY AND FROM THY KINDRED, AND GO INTO THE LAND WHICH I SHALL SHOW THEE."

This was a trial of Abraham's faith and obedience. God did not tell him where he was intending to lead him. It might be over high mountains, and through thick

forests; the journey might be long, painful, and dangerous. The country he was to leave was pleasant and fruitful. In the delightful plains of Chaldea "the Lord God had made trees to grow that were pleasant to the sight and good for food. The earth brought forth grass, and the herbs yielded fruit after their kinds." But the land to which Abraham was to go might, for any thing he knew to the contrary, be rugged and barren; it might be destitute of pastures for his flocks, and be inhabited by a fierce and cruel people; besides, Abraham was now seventy-five years old. There is something very affecting in beholding a man of that age leaving the home of his youth and the scenes endeared to him by a thousand fond recollections. But Abraham did not stop to ask any questions, or make any objections; he promptly obeyed the call, for he knew that God's commands were always right.

"O'er deserts, floods, and steeps, at Heaven's command,
The pilgrim journeys to that distant land."

When Abraham told his friends what God had commanded him to do, several of them determined to go with him. They had probably forsaken the idolatry of their country-

men, and were now worshippers of the true God. Nahor, Abraham's brother, Lot, his nephew, and even Terah, his aged father, rose up and departed with him. Abraham was a married man, and was accompanied by his wife Sarah, and the others all took their families, their flocks and herds, and all their substance with them.

They were first led to Haran, or as it is sometimes called, Charran. This was a flat and barren region westward of Ur. How long Abraham continued here we do not know; some suppose about five years, while others think but a few months. Abraham was here called to part with his father. The aged sire had long lived to be a comfort to his children. He had seen them grow up like olive plants around him. God had given him that greatest of all blessings which a father can have, a *pious family*, and he could say, "Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

After the death of Terah, God appeared to Abraham a second time, and commanded him to remove again to a land that he would show him. He also at this time made to

Abraham one of the most extraordinary promises: "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing. AND IN THEE SHALL ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED."

There are two distinct promises here. The first is, that Abraham shall be the father *of a great nation.* This promise was abundantly fulfilled. The Jews were Abraham's descendants, and we know they became a very great nation, and they have continued to be, indeed, a very numerous people to this day.

The second promise is, "AND IN THEE SHALL ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED." What does this mean. It means that the GREAT MESSIAH, the LORD JESUS CHRIST, should descend from Abraham. He was to come as the Saviour of the world. By his provision of mercy for the world, all men might repent of their sins and find pardon. He was to be the greatest blessing ever given to man. He is a Saviour for you and me, and thus through Abraham a blessing is prepared for us.

When Abraham had received this second

command, he resolved at once to obey it. Terah was dead. His brother Nahor was settled in Haran, and concluded to stay by the grave of his father. But Lot would not suffer Abraham to go alone; he wished to share in the blessings of his pious uncle, and resolved to go with him. They gathered together their servants and their flocks, and commenced their journey westward. They knew not where they were to go, but they had God for their protector and guide, and could trust confidently in him. In the New Testament this *trust* is called *faith*. "By *faith* Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should afterward receive for an inheritance, obeyed, and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

God now led Abraham and his company into a very different land from that which they had left. Haran was level and barren. There was a sameness in the desert plains that stretched away in the distance, which made them dull and uninteresting. The country at which they now arrived was broken and uneven. Here a lofty mountain rose suddenly from the plain, and there was a deep and romantic glen. Now the traveller

winds his way over a rocky hill or along a steep precipice, while just before him is spread out a beautiful valley filled with fruits and flowers. The Bible describes it as "a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, and vines, and fig-trees, and pomegranates, a land of oil-olive and honey." This was just such a place as Abraham wanted. He had many cattle, and sheep, and goats, and needed a country adapted to pasturage, a country where his shepherds could lead the flocks into green valleys, and upon fruitful hills, and by streams of running water. In this fine land, which was called Canaan, Abraham was to take up his abode.

He first pitched his tent at Shechem, where the city of Naplouse now stands. It is a fine vale, between two mountains called Ebal and Gerizim.* We cannot tell precisely how it appeared in the days of Abraham, but modern travellers describe the present appearance of the place as exceedingly beautiful. They

* For an account of the interesting transaction which afterward took place here, see Life of Moses, published by the Sunday School Union of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

assure us nothing can be finer than the view of the city standing in this valley, when seen from the surrounding heights. As you approach from the hills, it appears embosomed in the most delightful and fragrant bowers, half concealed by rich gardens, and stately trees collected into groves, all around the bold and picturesque vale.

One of the first things that Abraham did after he had erected his tents was to build an altar to the Lord. The altar in those days was either a mound of earth or a square heap of stones, on which sheep and oxen were offered in sacrifice to God. These sacrifices signified *two things*. First, they were *gratitude offerings*, in acknowledgment of God's goodness in giving oxen and sheep, and the fruits of the field to man. Secondly, when the beasts were slain for sacrifice, it was done *as a confession that those who slew them had sinned, and deserved to suffer for their crimes. But these offerings signified that those who made them believed God would accept another sacrifice in the place of man, so that man might be pardoned, and not perish. They pointed to the* LORD JESUS

CHRIST, *who was to come and suffer in our place. As the animal that was sacrificed was innocent, so would the Saviour be innocent. As the animal suffered for others' sins, and not his own, so would the Saviour suffer, not for any sins that he had committed, but for those of man. As the animal's blood was shed, so would the blood of the Saviour be shed.*

It was in this way that Abraham manifested his faith in that Saviour who was to come. And believing in a saviour *to come*, he was saved, as well as those who now believe in a Saviour *that has come.*

CHAPTER II.

An account of the Canaanites—Farther description of the country—God foresees that they will go on increasing in wickedness, and determines to take the country from them, and give it to Abraham's descendants—Abraham removes to a mountain near Bethel—Erects a second altar—A mountain a delightful place for worship—Abraham's example—Address to the reader.

THE country where Abraham had now taken up his abode was inhabited by a people called Canaanites. They were the descendants of one of Noah's grandsons,

whose name was Canaan, and received their name from him. These people had already become wicked, but God was patient and long-suffering toward them, and unwilling, at present, to cast them off. But he looked forward and saw what they would be at a future time, just as clearly as we see what is now passing before us. Suppose the scene was before us now, as it was before God then. We should see a people rich in mercies from the Lord. A fine country would be spread out before us; its valleys would be filled with fields of grain; springs would gush out from the sides of the hills, and pure streams be seen winding their way through the vales: here would rise a grove of lofty palm-trees, loaded with delicious fruit, and there clusters of the olive-tree would form a shady bower; the cattle would be straying through the rich pastures, and the sheep and lambs gamboling on the hills; a fine soft sky would be spread out over our heads, cities and villages would meet the eye in different directions, and we should behold a land which the Lord had blessed.

We should say the people of this land ought to be a verv good people, and very

grateful to God; that prayer and praise should be offered up in every family; and that every village should have its house of worship. We should say these highly favoured people should live in peace and love, and that whatsoever things were honest and lovely, and of good report, should abound among them. But instead of this, we should find them a race of wicked idolaters; a people who had forsaken the God of their pious fathers for the worship of dumb idols; war and violence would be heard in the land; and cruelties and crimes, too bad to mention, would appear in every quarter. You would see even parents sacrificing their own children to their bloody idol Moloch, that is, burning them alive in the worship of an image of brass or iron.

Now this is a true picture of these Canaanites about four hundred years after Abraham went to live in the land. God saw that this would be their conduct, and he determined to take the country from them, and give it to a better people. But he would not do this until "*the cup of their iniquities was full.*" He therefore said to Abra-

ham, "Unto thy seed or descendants will I give this land."

Abraham now removed to a mountain on the east of Bethel. This might have been either to find a place of greater security from the inhabitants, or to obtain fresh pasturage for his cattle, or perhaps to see more of the country. On this mountain he erected another altar to the Lord. A mountain was a very fit place for worship. Its retirement, its pure air, and its elevation, all seemed to invite the mind to holy meditations.

It is pleasing to see the piety of Abraham. He was in a land where the people were given up to heathenism. Few, if any, were willing to join him in the worship of God. The whole force of evil example was against him. But everywhere he went he erected an altar to God. He kept his family and servants from the wickedness which surrounded them, and pursued a pure worship amid a corrupt and corrupting idolatry.

When you think of Abraham, my dear children, do you not wish to be like him? Do you not wish to have such *decision of mind* and *firmness of character*? such *love to God* as he had; such as would

enable you to stand out against a world of sin and sinners. If then you would be like Abraham, you must have *faith* like him. He believed God, believed that God would keep him, believed he would fulfil his promises to him, and by faith looked forward to heaven as his great reward. He did not consider this world as his home, but reckoned himself only as "a pilgrim or sojourner" here —one travelling to a better country. Happy are they, whether old or young, who follow the example of faithful Abraham—they can say

"Strangers and pilgrims here below,
This earth we know is not our place,
But hasten through the vale of wo,
And, restless to behold thy face,
Swift to our heavenly country move,
Our everlasting home above."

"We have no 'biding city here,
But seek a city out of sight,
Thither our steady course we steer
Aspiring to the plains of light;
Jerusalem, the saints' abode,
Whose founder is the living God."

CHAPTER III.

God sends a famine upon the land of Canaan—A sad picture—In this world the righteous often suffer with the wicked—Abraham journeys to Egypt—His fear leads him into difficulty—The famine ceases, and he returns to Canaan—Abraham and Lot separate—A contrast—Lot's unfortunate choice—God appears and renews his promise to Abraham—A favourite spot—Abraham not ashamed of his religion.

ABRAHAM had not been long in Canaan before he met with a severe trial; God sent a famine on the land. The famines in the East were usually the effect of drought; no clouds gathered in the sky; the sun poured down his beams day after day upon the unsheltered earth, and gradually the springs ceased to flow, and the brooks dried up; then the grass withered in the fields, and the leaves upon the trees died; the famishing cattle put out their parched tongues, and every thing looked mournful and desolate. The fruits of former years were gradually consumed, and men looked on each other, and knew not what to do.

This famine was doubtless sent to chastise the wicked Canaanites for their sins; it was intended to show them the folly and sin of worshipping idols. How vain were such gods

as could not raise a cloud in the sky, or bring down a drop of rain on the desolate earth, gods which must leave their foolish worshippers to perish in the time of their greatest need!

In this world the righteous often suffer for the misconduct of the wicked: so it was with Abraham; he and his servants and his cattle pined under the dreadful scourge of Providence. This was a severe trial of Abraham's faith: he had scarcely entered the promised land before he was driven out of it; and where was he to go! Unbelief might have whispered, "Go back to Chaldea, go back to the fertile soil and rich pastures you have left." But faith uttered a very different language; it urged him to go forward in the path of obedience, and leave God to take care of the rest. Abraham did so. Egypt was near by, and famine did not prevail there: it was watered by the river Nile, and this river received its supplies from the distant high lands of Abyssinia, where the rains continued to descend. So Abraham took his flocks and herds, and journeyed toward Egypt.

As they drew near to Egypt, Abraham began to think of the people who dwelt where he was

going. He had no very good opinion of them, and with reason. His wife Sarah was a very beautiful woman. As people lived much longer in those days than they do now, they retained their strength and beauty much longer: Sarah was at least sixty-five years old at this time, and perhaps more; but she was still a very attractive woman. The Egyptian women were dark and swarthy, while she was of a light and fair complexion. This made Abraham fear that the Egyptians would kill him for the sake of getting possession of his wife. Instead of trusting in God to protect him, as he had done at other times, he gave way to these fears, and acted unworthy of himself and his religion. He said to Sarah, "Behold, now I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon, therefore it shall come to pass when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they will say, This is his wife, and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive: say, I pray thee, that thou art my sister, that it may be well with me for thy sake, and my soul shall live because of thee." This was no falsehood, but it was keeping back part of the truth. Sarah was indeed Abraham's sister: they had the same father,

but different mothers. Such marriages are not allowable now, but it might have been better that Abraham should marry his half-sister than to marry into a family of the idolatrous Chaldeans.

Abraham and Sarah had scarcely reached Egypt before the news of Sarah's extraordinary beauty reached the king. He sent and brought her into the royal palace; and as he supposed Abraham to be only her brother, he treated him with great respect. Sarah was on the point of becoming the wife of the king, when God interposed in a remarkable manner for her deliverance. The Bible tells us that "the Lord plagued the king and his house with great plagues, because of Sarah, Abraham's wife." It seems the people of Egypt had not at this time lost all knowledge of the true God; they understood that these plagues were from him, and that he was displeased with the king. When they inquired for the cause, they readily found that it was because the king had taken away the wife of Abraham. "And the king called Abraham and said: What is this thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? why saidst thou, She is my

sister? for I might have taken her for my wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way."

This was a mild, but rather cutting reproof to Abraham: it probably proved salutary to him, for a good man is ready to improve from every merited rebuke. King Solomon says, "Reprove a wise man, and he will be still wiser."

The famine had now ceased in Canaan; the winds had wafted over the clouds and pressed them one against another, until their fine watery particles mingled together, and descended in refreshing showers upon the parched earth.

> "On the thin air without a prop
> Hung fruitful showers around,
> At God's command they sink and drop
> Their fatness on the ground."

Now the air was fresh and pure, the winds no longer brought clouds of dust, the withered grass sprung up from the brown earth, the buds on the vine swelled and burst into clusters of green leaves; the olive and fig-trees, which had been bare and leafless, began to put on their green robes; the springs bubbled up again from their fountains, and streams

began again to stray through the valleys. Once more Canaan was clothed in verdure, and smiled in beauty and fertility.

> ——————New harvests rise;
> A softer lustre gilds the genial skies,
> For panting flocks adown the mountain's side
> Bright gushing streamlets pour their silver tide,
> Reviving summer fills her horn, and brings
> Content and plenty on her balmy wings.
>
> MRS. BULMER.

Abraham had received a large present of sheep and oxen, asses, camels and servants, from Pharaoh, king of Egypt. With these, and the flocks and herds which he took with him when he left Canaan, he now returned. He was accompanied by Lot, who had been with him in Egypt: they went first to Bethel, where they had formerly erected an altar. Here Abraham had enjoyed sweet communion with God, and he felt an attachment to the very place; besides, he had just returned safely from his journey, and this, and the removal of the famine, called for joyful thanksgiving to God.

Abraham and Lot were now very rich; they had large flocks and many servants. But riches often bring trouble and anxiety, instead of ease and comfort. So it proved on

this occasion. Contentions arose between the shepherds of Abraham and those of Lot, probably about the richest pastures and best watering places. The Canaanites occupied a part of the country, and the flocks and herds of Abraham and Lot had become so numerous that they could not find sufficient pasturage. Under these circumstances they found it best to separate. This was done in a manner that shows the amiable character of Abraham to fine advantage.

"And Abraham said to Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between thee and me, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left."

This was very generous in Abraham. He was the oldest man, and every way Lot's superior: he might have first chosen for himself, and then left Lot to take the portion that remained; but his noble soul was above selfishness. It would be very pleasing to see Lot imitating this fine example. A little civility or good breeding might have taught him to

refer the choice back to Abraham; but he seems on this occasion, at least, to have been guided only by a selfish spirit, and to have forgotten the obligations due to his excellent uncle. He lifted up his eyes and surveyed the surrounding country: the plain of Jordan lay directly before him; its fertile fields and green pastures presented a most inviting appearance. The most beautiful river in all Palestine was winding its way through the midst of it. The Bible tells us "it was like the garden of the Lord." Lot did not stop to consider the bad character of the people inhabiting this fertile plain, but immediately chose it for his residence.

The two friends now separated. Lot journeyed eastward, and pitched his tents near Sodom; but "the men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly," so that we shall see in the end he had made a most unfortunate choice.

Lot had no sooner departed than God appeared and renewed his promise to Abraham. He directed him to look abroad upon the country in every direction, and promised to give him and his descendants all the land which he saw; he also promised to make his

posterity an exceedingly numerous people. "Arise," said he, "walk through the land in the length of it, and the breadth of it, for I will give it unto thee." Abraham accordingly arose and journeyed southward to the oak of Mamre. This was a favourite spot with the patriarch: there was probably a delightful grove of oaks, which afforded a quiet and agreeable shelter from the sun for his tents and cattle: it was near Hebron, one of the most ancient cities in the world.

No sooner had Abraham pitched his tents in his shady retreat than he erected another altar to God. He was never ashamed or afraid to avow his religion.

CHAPTER IV.

The first war which history explicitly records—War a bad business—What wars may be justified—Lot and his family taken captive—Abraham pursues the robbers and liberates the captives—A joyful sight—Interview with the king of Salem—Interview with the king of Sodom—Justice and generosity.

A NEW scene now opens upon us. We have an account of the first war which history records. Would to God it had been the last. But

from that time to this the earth has been filled with violence. Perhaps, my dear children, you have never thought of this subject in the right manner. You have been used to see men clad in beautiful uniform; the prancing steeds, the nodding plumes, and graceful evolutions of moving ranks, and the spirit stirring sounds of the drum and trumpet, have appeared quite captivating to you. You have perhaps thought, "I should like to be an officer, and ride on a proud war-horse, and have a bright sword hanging at my side or glittering in my hand." But think once more. What are all these military preparations for? Go into a battle field, and you will learn: there you will see great numbers of men gathered together, and for what? Why, to blow out each other's brains, and thrust their weapons of death into each other's hearts. There you will see men all red and gory with their own blood, wounded men will be lying on the ground, with their limbs quivering with agony, and their countenances pale with keen distress: many of these men are husbands and fathers; they have little children at home that love them; these little children will hear the sad tale of their sufferings, but will never see them more. What if

one of these men lying on the cold damp ground without any one to bind up his wounds or even speak a kind word to him, was your own dear father? would you think then that war was a fine thing. No, my dear children, war as it is generally practised is hateful: it fills families with mourning; it sets men to murdering those who never did them any injury, and whom they never even saw before; it burns cities, and turns out aged people and helpless mothers, with their little infants, to suffer and perish with hunger and cold: most of the men slain in battle are absolutely murdered, and those who slay them are nothing less than murderers.

"What are those men whose names create such dread,
Napoleon, * * * * or a Cesar dead;
What are the deeds from which they gather fame?
Plain wilful murder with another name.
And such as shine in honour's foremost place
Are licensed butchers of the human race."

A war to *defend* our homes and our firesides may be just; but wars for what wicked men call honour and glory, wars for plunder and conquest, are abhorred by God and detested by all the good.

While Abraham was at the oak of Mamre, he received the tidings of a sad calamity

which had befallen Lot. It seems there were five cities in the fertile valley of the Jordan. They were Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, and Zoar; these five cities were governed by five kings, and these five kings had been subject to Chederlaomer, king of Elam or Persia. They had become tired of their bondage, and determined to free themselves from the king of Persia: Chederlaomer engaged the other kings to assist him, and marched against them: the five kings united their armies, and met their invaders in the vale of Siddim, but their army was put to flight, and a great part of it destroyed. The conquerors then plundered their cities, and carried away as many as they could make prisoners; among these prisoners were Lot and his family.

When a messenger came and told Abraham what had befallen Lot, he was greatly affected. Though Lot had treated him quite ungenerously by choosing the best part of the country for himself, and leaving him to live as he might on the poorer part of the land, still Abraham indulged no unkind feelings toward him. He at once determined to risk his life in an attempt to rescue him from the

robbers, and immediately put himself at the head of three hundred and eighteen of his servants; he was also joined by three friendly chiefs, named Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner. At the head of this band he pursued the plundering army, and overtook them in the night at a place called Dan. This is supposed by some to have been near the fountains of Jericho, about thirty or forty miles from the oak of Mamre, but others suppose it to have been near the springs of the Jordan, about two hundred miles distant.

Abraham had but a small force with which to attack a large and victorious army, and even if he gained the victory, they might carry off the female captives on their swift camels and dromedaries. But he divided his little band with so much skill, and fell upon them with so much courage and spirit that they were completely routed; they fled, and Abraham pursued them to Hobah, a place near the ancient and beautiful city of Damascus. The flying foe was finally obliged to give up all which had been taken. Poor Lot and his distressed family were delivered, and all the men, women, children, and goods were retaken. Abraham marched back in triumph,

bearing with him a joyful company, whom he had rescued from violence and bondage. It must have been exceedingly pleasant to see Lot and his wife and daughters returning under the protection of their kind uncle.

On his return Abraham passed by Jerusalem: it was then called Salem, and was governed by Melchisedek, who was a good man in the midst of wicked times: he was not only a king, but also "a priest of the most high God:" Melchisedek, in the true spirit of hospitality, brought out bread and wine to refresh the weary company: he blessed Abraham, and said, "Blessed be Abraham of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth, and blessed be the most high God, who hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand."

In token of his gratitude to God for his late victory, and as a mark of respect to Melchisedek in his office of priest, Abraham presented him with one-tenth of the spoils which he had taken from the enemy.

The king of Sodom also came out to meet them: he was overjoyed at Abraham's victory, and said, "Give me the persons and take the goods to thyself;" but Abraham had

not fought for riches: his only object had been to deliver the oppressed. With that lofty generosity, which was a noble trait in his character, he refused to take the least thing. "I have," said he, "lifted up my hand unto the Lord the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoe latchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldst say, I have made Abraham rich; save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion belonging to the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre, let them take their portion."

Here were justice and generosity both. Abraham had a right to give up his own claims; but he had no right to give up those of Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre. He, however, sets them an example, and then leaves them to do as they please.

CHAPTER V.

God appears again to Abraham, to comfort him and renew his promise to him—Abraham makes a request—God promises to grant his request, and to make a solemn covenant with him—He informs Abraham that his descendants must pass through a great trial before they are put in possession of the promised land of Canaan—Abraham has a vision.

After Abraham's return from pursuing the king of Persia, he seems to have fallen into distress of mind; we do not know on what account, but God knew, and like a tender father he pitied his faithful servant. While Abraham was sorrowful and cast down, God appeared to him, and said, "Fear not, Abraham, for I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward." This was very comforting language. Abraham was a stranger in a strange land; the people around him were generally idolaters; he could neither associate with them nor trust to their justice or friendship.

His riches might tempt them to fall upon him and plunder his possessions, or even take his life; but God assures him he will be his shield, to defend him from all harm; he may lie down and sleep as quietly in his tent as though he was surrounded and defended by

ten thousand armed men. Such a promise is better security than a wall of fire; but God promises not only to be his defence, but his EXCEEDING GREAT REWARD. He will lead him safely through his pilgrimage on earth, and up to his final rest in heaven.

This promise encouraged Abraham to speak to God of matters about which he felt much anxiety. As yet he had no child to bear his name or inherit his property. "And Abraham said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus; behold, to me thou hast given no child, and lo, one born in my house is my heir." God replied that Eliezer should not be his heir, but he would give him a son. To encourage him still farther, God told him to look abroad upon the heavens. As Abraham gazed upon the innumerable multitude of stars that sparkled in the vaulted sky, he asked him if he could number them, and then told him his descendants should be, like these stars, a countless host.

The patriarch's fears were all removed; he believed God's promise, and not only that his posterity should be very numerous, but that the Saviour of the world should come among

them, as God had already promised. The Bible informs us that "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." This passage means a great deal; it means that Abraham joyfully trusted in God's promise of BLESSING ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH IN HIM. He believed God; he looked forward to a coming Saviour; he trusted in that Saviour, and felt his heart warming with heavenly love. He could say—

"Things that are not, as though they were,
Thou callest by their name;
Present with thee the future are,
With thee, the great I AM."

"The thing surpasses all my though
But faithful is my Lord;
Through unbelief I stagger not,
For God hath spoke the word."

We may suppose that when God made such promises as that which he had now been making to Abraham, he usually gave some sign to accompany the promise; this led Abraham to ask by what sign he should know that he was to inhabit the land of Canaan. To confirm his faith fully, and remove every shadow of doubt, God was pleased to enter into a solemn covenant with him. He said unto Abraham, "Take me a heifer of

three years old, and a goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle dove, and a young pigeon." Abraham took these creatures, and slew and dressed them: he then, according to the ancient method of making covenants, divided the beasts, and placed the halves at a little distance from each other: the birds he did not divide. This was done in the daytime; and Abraham carefully waited by his sacrifice for the appearing of the Lord. The birds (vultures probably) came down to alight upon the flesh; but the patriarch drove them away. As the sun went down, and the shadows of evening gathered around, Abraham fell into a deep sleep, "*and so a horror of great darkness fell upon him.*" The meaning of this was soon explained; it represented the dark and gloomy afflictions which Abraham's descendants were to suffer before they came into possession of the land of Canaan. God told him that they were to be strangers in a strange land, namely, in Egypt, and were to serve the Egyptians through a long and grievous bondage; but said he, "That nation whom they shall serve will I judge, and afterward they shall come out with great substance; and thou shalt go to

thy fathers in peace, thou shalt be buried in a good old age; but in the fourth generation they shall come hither again, and inherit this land." He also went on to say they could not have it at present, for the people had not filled up the cup of their iniquities, and he would spare them until they had.

Then the Lord manifested himself to Abraham: the patriarch saw as it were a smoking furnace and a burning lamp passing between the divided parts of the sacrifice. Probably the smoking furnace was intended to represent the sore afflictions of Abraham's descendants, and the burning lamp to signify, that in the midst of the darkest times God would be a light to them. They passed between the divided portions of the sacrifice as a token that he now established his covenant with Abraham.

CHAPTER VI.

By Sarah's advice, Abraham marries a second wife, named Hagar—Hagar becomes haughty and insolent—Sarah's peace is disturbed, and she allows herself to become angry—Hagar flees toward Egypt—The angel of the Lord appears to her, and tells her to return—A remarkable prediction—A son born—God again appears to Abraham—His name changed—A promise.

ABRAHAM was now about eighty-five years old, and Sarah about seventy-five; they had been in Canaan ten years, and all this time had passed since God made the promise, that Abraham should be the father of a numerous people. But still they had no child. This was a cause of anxiety and affliction to them, and they knew not how the promise was to be fulfilled. As God had simply promised a son to Abraham, Sarah concluded he might possibly intend that Abraham should marry a second wife.

She accordingly advised him to marry her handmaid Hagar, hoping to become a mother by adoption. Through his great anxiety to have the promise fulfilled, Abraham unfortunately consented to his wife's proposal; and Hagar became his secondary, or inferior wife. But both Abraham and Sarah soon had reason to repent of this rash step. Finding

herself exalted from the rank of a servant to that of a wife, Hagar soon became haughty and insolent toward her mistress. It was hard to bear her ingratitude and pride, and Sarah became impatient and vexed under it. When people allow themselves to become angry, they often do and say things which they find occasion to regret afterward. So it was with Sarah on this occasion; she unreasonably laid the blame of Hagar's insolence upon Abraham, and censured him for the evil which had come upon her through her own imprudence. Abraham had always lived very happily with Sarah; he had been one of the kindest of husbands, and she one of the best of wives.

> "His house she enter'd, there to be a light
> Shining within when all without was night;
> Like guardian angel o'er his life presiding,
> Doubling his pleasure, and his cares dividing."

The patriarch was altogether unwilling that any thing should now mar their happiness, after so many years of peace. He accordingly gave Hagar up to Sarah to correct as she saw best.

Sarah was too much irritated by Hagar's ingratitude and insolence to pursue a proper

course; and we are told, she "*dealt hardly with her.*" The haughty spirit of Hagar was provoked by this severe treatment: she left the house of Abraham, and fled toward Egypt, her native country. At length she became wearied with her toilsome journey, and sat down by a well to rest. Here the angel of the Lord appeared to her: to let her know that she was known, he called her by name, and said, "Hagar, Sarah's maid, whence camest thou, and whither wilt thou go?" She answered, "I flee from the face of my mistress, Sarah." He replied, "Return unto thy mistress, and submit thyself to her hands." He then went on to promise her, that she should have a son, who would be the father of a very numerous people. She was commanded to call him Ishmael. "He will be," said the angel of the Lord, "a wild man: his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of his brethren."

Hagar was filled with solemn awe; and deeply humbled under a sense of the divine goodness. "And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked

after him that seeth me." She then called the well where she had sat, *Beer-lahai-roi: a well of the Living One, who seeth me.*

Hagar now returned to her mistress; and, we may hope, in a better spirit than when she started for Egypt.

It was not long after her return before she bore Abraham a son; who, according to God's command, was called Ishmael. Perhaps the patriarch thought this was the child of promise; but if so, he was mistaken. Ishmael was indeed to be the father of a numerous people; but they proved to be a very different people from those whom God intended should be *his covenant people;* and among whom the Saviour was to come. Ishmael himself was far from proving a comfort to his father. He became the occasion of much unhappiness in Abraham's family.

Thirteen long years passed away, after the birth of Ishmael; and Abraham reached his ninety-ninth year: Sarah was eighty-nine; and still they waited the fulfilment of God's promise. No son had been given but Ishmael; and he was not the child meant by the promise. Abraham's faith and patience had been put to a severe trial; but they did not

fail. He still believed God would be faithful to his word: and he did not believe in vain. In this memorable year God appeared to him a fifth time; and addressed him in the most encouraging language: "I am the Almighty God walk before me, and be thou perfect: and I will make my covenant, between thee and me; and I will multiply thee exceedingly." Abraham was filled with reverence and love, and fell on his face before the Lord.

The patriarch had been called ABRAM up to this time; but God now changed his name to ABRAHAM. ABRAM signifies a *high father:* and ABRAHAM is supposed to mean *father of a great multitude.* The name of his wife was also changed: she had before been called Sarai, *a princess;* but was now named Sarah, which is supposed to mean, *princess of multitudes;** because, as God promised, she should have a son; and should be "the mother of nations and kings." "And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him, for an everlasting covenant; and with his seed after him."

* See Coke.

God now directed that Abraham should dedicate his family to him; and entered into covenant with him, by a religious ordinance, called the ordinance of circumcision.

Abraham was filled with delight; and again fell upon his face, to give expression to his joy. As Ishmael was now excluded from being the child of promise, the feelings of the father, feelings of tenderness, rose up in the patriarch's heart. He had trained up this son with tender care. He had watched his expanding intellect and growing form with interest and delight; and he was now anxious to receive some promise in his favour. "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" said he. God replied, "As for Ishmael, I have heard thee. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. His sons shall be twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation: but my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bare unto thee."

CHAPTER VII.

Three strangers approach the tent of Abraham—The patriarch prepares a feast for them—Beautiful picture of the hospitality of early times—High and unexpected honour—Description of the valley of the Jordan—Wickedness of Sodom, and the other cities of the plain—God makes known to Abraham his fearful determination concerning them—Abraham's affecting plea—Kindness and condescension of God—The righteous a great blessing to their neighbors—Kind address to the reader.

ABRAHAM was still living at his favourite spot, the oak grove, near Hebron. The green branches were clothed in their summer robes, and formed a shady bower over the patriarch's tent. As he one day sat in the door of his tent, looking out on the beauties of nature around him, he saw three strangers approaching his quiet residence. He at once arose, and went out to meet them, and invited them to share the hospitality of his house. He seems to have been particularly struck with the appearance of one of them; and turning to him, he said, "My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant. Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts:

after that ye shall pass on, for therefore are ye come to your servant."

There is something really beautiful in this picture of patriarchal hospitality. In those ancient times *shoes* such as ours were not in use. The foot was protected only by *sandals*, or *soles*, which were fastened round the foot with straps: water for the feet was therefore a great refreshment in so warm a country at the end of a day's journey; and this is the first thing that Abraham proposes. The *second* comfort necessary to a weary traveller was rest in the shade. The patriarch accordingly proposes that they should *rest themselves under the tree.*

I will fetch a morsel of bread. This was the third requisite, and is introduced in its proper order, as eating *immediately* after exertion or fatigue is very unwholesome. The strong action of the lungs and heart should have time to diminish, before any food is received into the stomach: otherwise digestion is prevented, and fever in a greater or less degree produced.

For therefore are ye come, says Abraham. In those ancient days there were no inns or houses for public entertainment; but travel-

lers were kindly entertained by the hospitable with whom they met in their journeys.*

The three strangers were highly pleased with Abraham's kind attentions, and replied to his invitation, "So do as thou hast said."

"And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes upon the hearth. And Abraham ran unto the herd and fetched a calf, tender and good, and gave it unto a young man, and he hasted to dress it. And he took butter and milk, and the calf which had been dressed, and set it before them, and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat."

God was, during all this time, preparing high honour for Abraham. The patriarch had supposed that he was only refreshing some weary strangers on their journey: but he was in reality entertaining messengers from the upper world.

He was not forgetful to entertain strangers; and behold, he had entertained angels unawares. Yes, and he had done more than this; for one of the visitants was the glorious SON OF GOD, the very being who was afterward

* See Dr. A. Clarke.

to unite himself with a human soul and body, and become a Saviour for a guilty world.

He said to Abraham, "Where is Sarah, thy wife?" Abraham replied, "Behold, in the tent." He answered, "I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life, and lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son." Sarah was at this moment listening at the tent door, and by laughing showed that she doubted the truth of the promise. The Lord mildly reproved her unbelief, and said, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" When Sarah saw that her unbelief was known, she was alarmed and confused, and tried to hide her fault by denying it, for which she received still farther reproof.

The strangers now rose up to depart, and went toward Sodom. Abraham went out with them, and proceeded a little distance. Two of them went forward, while the Lord remained and talked with Abraham.

I have already spoken of Sodom and the adjoining cities. They stood in one of the most delightful vales in the whole world. It enjoyed a fine healthy climate. The soil was inexhaustibly fertile, and beautiful streams of run-

ning water wound their way through it in different places. This lovely vale abounded in grain, pasturage, fruits, and flowers. It is compared in Scripture to the garden of Eden for beauty and fertility. The people who lived in this lovely spot had every thing around them to call forth their gratitude to God.

They could not look from their windows, or ascend to the roof of their houses,* or walk abroad in their fields, or sit down under their shady bowers, without beholding the clearest proofs of God's goodness. Had they only been as grateful as God was good, they would have seen enough to call forth their praise in every tint of beauty which he had painted upon the flowers; in every cluster of fruit with which he had loaded their vines; in every stream that went murmuring through their fields, and in every blade of grass that sprung up beneath their feet. But the people who lived in this delightful valley were far from being a pious or grateful people. On the contrary, they were some of the vilest sinners upon whom the sun ever rose. They lived as though the sun only shone to light them to

* The houses were made with flat roofs, on which the people walked, and sometimes slept.

deeds of wickedness, or as though they thought God caused the rains to descend, and the earth to bring forth fruit, only to feed the most abject wretches. Instead of the voice of prayer and praise, the song of the drunkard, and the shouts of revelry were heard throughout the vale. Their sins rose up to heaven as a dark and fearful cloud, and called for some dreadful judgment. Finally, God determined to make an awful example of them before all the world, and he was on his way to destroy them when he appeared to Abraham.

As the two angels were about to go forward toward Sodom, the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."

What a pleasing testimony God gives to the faithfulness of Abraham! And what a blessing it is to have a pious parent, and to be brought up in a pious family! Such a family

is a pleasant school of Christian instruction. There, in the freshness of the morning and in the stillness of the evening, the family Bible is read, the songs of praise are sung, and the voice of prayer and thanksgiving is heard.

> "Blest is the pious house
> Where zeal and friendship meet;
> Their songs of praise, their mingled vows,
> Make their communion sweet."

I would rather be the child of a godly father and a pious mother than to be born in a palace and be an heir to a crown. My dear children, if God has given you religious parents, who love your souls and are daily praying for you, he has given you that which is worth more than the wealth of the Indies.

But I must now go on with the history. After God had expressed his approbation of Abraham, he went on to tell the patriarch what he was about to do. "And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it which is come unto me; and if not, I will know."

We must not suppose that God did not know what was the condition of Sodom, or

that he needed any farther information concerning the conduct of its inhabitants. But as he was conversing with a man, he condescended to use such language as men are in the habit of using. He also sets an *example* of *candour and justice*, that we may learn not to judge by report, but inquire into matters before we make up our minds, or pronounce sentence upon our fellow beings.

Abraham knew that his nephew Lot lived in Sodom, and he supposed there might be some other worshippers of the true God there. His tender heart was afflicted at the thought of their perishing in the overthrow of the city. He accordingly ventured to plead with God to spare the city for their sakes. His prayer is most beautiful and affecting. "And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that *are* therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? And the Lord said, If I find

in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which *am but* dust and ashes: Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for *lack of* five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy *it*. And he spake unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And he said I will not do *it* for forty's sake. And he said *unto him*, O let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do *it*, if I find thirty there. And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy *it* for twenty's sake. And he said, O, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy *it* for ten's sake. And the Lord went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place."

Abraham now returned to his family, and

the Lord pursued his way toward the cities of the plain.

We have in what has been just related a very delightful view of the mercy and goodness of God. He not only permits Abraham to plead with him as a man pleads with his friend; but he promises to spare the cities of the plain, if there can be found in them even *ten* righteous persons, which would be only two to each of the five cities. This shows how precious in the sight of the Lord are his saints:

> "But saints are lovely in his sight:
> He views his children with delight;
> He knows their hopes, and marks their fear,
> He looks, and loves his image there."

We also learn from this account what a great blessing the righteous are to the cities and countries where they live. Who can tell how many judgments are withheld for their sakes: or how many blessings are given in answer to their prayers! When the prophet Elijah was ascending to heaven, Elisha, his friend and companion, mournfully exclaimed: "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" He meant by this, that Elijah was by his prayers and labours a greater de-

fence to Israel than all its horses and chariots, and other warlike preparations. So it is with the righteous in any nation; their prayers and labours, and holy example, form a more sure defence than whole armies. Little do the wicked know what a blessing it is to have churches, and Bibles, and holy people among them. But, my dear children, the righteous cannot benefit the wicked always. The time will come when there will be a complete and everlasting separation—when it will be said: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still." Then the wicked will "go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." O can you bear the thought of living and dying in your sins, and of being separated from the good and the holy for ever! Will you not rather turn from your evil ways and live! But if you ever intend to repent, and come to Christ for pardon and holiness, you must begin now; you must begin to-day, lest death should come and surprise you in the midst of your sins, and you be obliged to take up the sorrowful lamentation: *The*

harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved. But now you may come: for "all things are now ready." "*The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth, say, Come. And let him that is athirst, come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*"

CHAPTER VIII.

The two angels enter Sodom—Lot is sitting at the gate—The gates of ancient cities the places where the courts met, and business was transacted—Conduct of the Sodomites toward the angels—They are smitten with blindness—Lot and his family sent out of the city—Fire from heaven consumes the cities of the plain—Fate of Lot's wife—Conduct of Lot.

THE angels that had left Abraham went on, and arrived at Sodom about the time the sun was casting his last rays upon the guilty city. As they entered, they found Lot sitting by the gate. The gates of ancient cities were the places where the courts were held, and the public business transacted. Some suppose Lot might have been one of the magistrates; and was sitting here to hear complaints and try causes. Others suppose, that as he knew the wickedness of the place, he went

to the gate to meet with any strangers that might come, and invite them to his house that they might not be abused.

As these very respectable and pleasing strangers entered the gate, Lot rose up and bowed to them. He then said, "Behold now, my lords, turn in I pray you into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet; and ye shall rise up early and go on your ways." That Lot might have an opportunity of manifesting his regard for their welfare, they at first objected, and spoke of passing the night in the street. But he pressed them greatly; and they finally consented to accept his hospitality, and entered his house; and he made them a feast.

They had not been in Lot's house long, before "the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house around, both old and young," from all parts of the city. It seems the news had spread through the city of the arrival of these interesting strangers; and this shameless mob had come with the intention of abusing them in the most horrible manner. They cried to Lot, and said: "Where are the men that came into thy house this night? bring them out unto us." No won-

der that the Bible should say, "The people of Sodom were sinners *exceedingly* before the Lord."

Here were people both *old* and *young*, and people *from every quarter*, gathered together for a purpose so abominable as to make us blush for human nature. When the youth of any place have lost all regard for the aged, and do not blush to commit the most abominable crimes even in the presence of their fathers, it is a sure sign of a dreadful state of wickedness. But when the aged have lost all reverence for themselves, when they do not fear to publish their shame to their own children, then guilt has reached the highest pitch, and such a people are ripe for ruin.

Lot now went out into the midst of these wretches in human shape, and tried to reason with them. "I pray you, brethren," said he, "do not so wickedly." But he found them as furious as a troop of wild tigers, and as brutish as a herd of swine. He was alarmed and confused, and knew not what to do.

In Eastern countries the rights of hospitality were deemed most sacred. A man who had received strangers under his roof was

considered bound to protect them even with his life. In his alarm Lot proposed to conciliate the mob by the offering of his two daughters. Some suppose these daughters were betrothed or engaged in marriage to two of the leaders of the city, and that Lot knew the rabble would not dare to accept his proposal. But if this were even so, it would not excuse him. He was placed in a most fearful condition, it is true; but we should never do evil that good may come. The Bible no more justifies Lot's proposal, than it justifies his first going to live with such a wicked people as the Sodomites. Both were wrong. At the same time we see how very anxious he was to protect the strangers who had come under his roof.

The men of Sodom were deaf alike to the voice of reason and of entreaty. They began to abuse Lot. "This one fellow," said they, "came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge; now will we deal worse with thee than with them. And they pressed hard upon Lot, and came near to break the door."

It was time now for the angels to begin to execute their mission. They put forth their

hand and pulled Lot into the house, and shut the door; and they smote the men that were at the door with blindness, both small and great.

We should suppose this might have alarmed them, and that they would have given up their wicked purpose: but they were not at all disposed to do so: they still madly pressed on, and groped about, trying to find the door.

The angels now informed Lot who they were, and for what purpose they had come. They inquired, "Hast thou here any besides? son-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring *them* out of this place: for we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it."

And Lot went out and spake unto his sons-in-law, who married, or, as some think, were betrothed to his daughters, and said, "Up; get you out of this place: for the Lord will destroy this city."

They heard the warning, but paid no attention to it; or rather, they "treated it as a ridiculous tale, the creature of Lot's invention, or the offspring of his fear." They laughed

at his fears, as many now laugh at hell who if they do not repent will wail there, and that for ever.

The dreadful ruin was now fast approaching; and yet Lot lingered as though he could not tear himself from the spot. He had at first chosen this place for a residence through improper motives; but God had overruled his stay for good. For twenty-three years he had been a preacher of righteousness to a most ungodly people. In him they had beheld an illustrious example of just conduct, benevolent actions, and genuine piety. He had laboured and suffered for their good, and now he could not bear to give them up. "And while he lingered, the angels laid hold of his hand, and that of his wife and his two daughters, the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city." When they were without the gates of the city, they said, "Escape for thy life: look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." Seeing the destruction so near, Lot began to fear that it would overtake him before he could get to the mountain. In this he forgot that God would not give any

command without also giving time in which to perform it. "And Lot said, O! not so, my Lord. Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast showed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die. Behold now, this city *is* near to flee unto, and it *is* a little one. O! let me escape thither, (*is* it not a little one?) and my soul shall live. And he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken. Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither: therefore the name of the city was called Zoar."

Just as the sun was rising Lot entered into Zoar. No sooner had he gained this place of refuge than the storm of God's displeasure burst upon the cities of the plain: sulphureous fires descended like floods from heaven. The soil was mixed with an inflammable substance called bitumen. The fire-shower from heaven kindled these stores of combustibles, and wrapped the whole plain in broad sheets of living flame. The guilty inhabitants were

taken by surprise, and in the midst of their crimes. Hope was cut off in a moment. Which way soever they fled, they were met by consuming flames; and not one soul escaped the terrific judgment which had overtaken their guilty cities.

You will recollect that Lot and his family were commanded to flee for their lives, and not to stop or even look back: but Lot's wife disobeyed this command. Whether she thought of returning to bring away some of her property, or whether she was displeased with the severity of God; or whether she doubted the word of the angels, we do not know; at all events, she stopped in the plain and perished. The Bible says, "she became a pillar of salt." It is difficult to tell exactly what this means. Some suppose that by the power of God she was miraculously changed into a pillar of rock salt, and still retained the human form. Others think she was struck with lightning, and encrusted with the sulphuric and bituminous matter, which not being afterward exposed to the action of fire, resisted the action of the element, and thus became permanent. Whatever might have been the *manner* of her destruction, we at least know

the *fact.* And we know the *reason* too: she disobeyed God: and her punishment is recorded in the Bible as a warning to sinners down to the end of time of the fearful consequences of disobedience.

When Lot saw the awful fate of the cities of the plain and the fire still raging, he feared to dwell in Zoar, and rose up and fled to the mountain. In this he again fell into an error. He should have gone to the mountain at first, as the angels directed; but after God had spared Zoar for his sake, he ought to have continued there. But let pity draw a friendly veil over his weak faith and the closing scene of his life. He was now an old man, and bereft of every earthly comfort that could cheer his declining years. His property was consumed, his wife dead, and, as he supposed, his family was for ever broken up and his name likely to perish. The errors that he fell into were more through *weakness* than *wickedness;* and were doubtless repented of and never *repeated.* He had spent *twenty-three years* in preaching righteousness and living righteously in Sodom; while many who have censured him with unsparing severity never spent *twenty-three hours* in try-

ing to benefit the souls of their fellow men. When his motives, and his life as a whole, are compared with those of his revilers, he will appear in comparison an angel of purity. As far as he did *intentionally* wrong, let him be blamed, but no farther.

CHAPTER IX.

Abraham goes early in the morning to ascertain the fate of the cities of the plain—Description of the place where they stood—Abraham removes—Difficulty with the king of Gezar—An amicable settlement.

ABRAHAM arose early in the morning, and went to the place where he had talked with God the day before. This was probably a mountain, or piece of elevated ground which overlooked the plain below. How eagerly did the patriarch ascend to this place, that he might learn the fate of the cities of the plain. He had often looked from the surrounding heights into that valley; and seen it smiling in beauty, and clothed with the richest robes of fertility. He now reached the summit of the rising ground, and filled with anxiety for the fate of Lot, he looked again! But what

a scene did he behold: when, "*lo the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.*"

Perhaps, before I go on with the history of Abraham, my young friends would like to have me tell them something about the *present state* of the place where the cities of the plain once stood. This once beautiful plain has long since totally disappeared. It is covered by an inland sea, generally said to be sixty or seventy miles in length, and eighteen in breadth; though some think it is not more than thirty miles long. It is usually called the Dead Sea; and is enclosed on the east and west by ranges of high mountains. On the north it is bounded by the plain of Jericho; from which it receives the waters of the river Jordan.

The water of this lake is clear, but very salt and bitter. It is so dense that a person may float like a cork upon its surface. Mr. Stephens an American traveller who visited it says: "When I threw myself upon my back, my body was half out of water. I could have lain there and read with perfect ease. In fact, I could have slept, and it would have been a much easier bed than the bushes

of Jericho. It was laughable to see one of the horses. As soon as his body touched the water he was afloat, and turned over on his side: he struggled with all his force to preserve his balance; but the moment he stopped moving, he turned over on his side again, and almost on his back; kicking his feet out of water and snorting with terror. The worst of my bath was, that after it was over, my skin was covered with a thick glutinous substance which required another washing to get rid of; and after I had wiped myself dry, my body burned and smarted, as if it had been turned round before a roasting fire. My face and ears were incrusted with salt, my hairs stood out, each particular hair on end; and my eyes were irritated and inflamed, so that I felt the effects of it for several days. In spite of all this, however, I was revived and refreshed by my bath, and mounted my horse a new man."

Dr. Shaw says, "Masses of bitumen are raised at certain times from the bottom of this sea. As soon as they touch the surface, and are thereby acted upon by the air, they burst at once with great smoke and noise." "On the shores of this sea or lake," says Mr. Maun-

drell, "we found a black sort of pebbles which burned on being held in the blaze of a candle, yielding a smoke of a very disagreeable smell; but though they lost in weight by burning, they lost nothing in size. The neighbouring hills abound with these sulphureous stones; and I saw pieces of them at the convent of St. John's which were two feet square, carved and polished as finely as black marble." It is supposed by some that the houses of Sodom, and the other cities of the plain, were built of these bituminous stones; and that the lightnings from heaven set them on fire when God overthrew their guilty inhabitants.

The Dead Sea has no visible outlet, though it is supposed the Jordan pours upward of six millions of tons into it daily. It is probable that it has one or more underground outlets, by which its waters are emptied into the Mediterranean Sea. Wilson observes in his "Travels in the Holy Land," that "no language of the most eloquent writer can give a proper description of that mournful desolation which reigns in this devoted region; or express that solemn horror which the scene is so much calculated to inspire. It is a striking monument of the tremendous wrath of God.

A profound silence, awful as death, hangs over this lake; but the sound of its hollow waters slowly rolling before the wind, along with heavy showers, were even more appalling than the desolation of its shores. It is at the present moment as Moses describes it in Deut. xxix, 23. The acts of the divine vengeance which have thrown it into such an awful state have been recorded by infinite Wisdom, to hold up an everlasting warning to countries involved in sin and wickedness."

Abraham did not continue long in the neighbourhood of this desolate place. Perhaps he feared that other judgments would follow; or else was so deeply affected by the melancholy fate of the ruined cities, that he could not bear to remain in sight of the place. He removed first to a place between Kadesh and Shur; and afterward fixed his residence in Gezar, a city of the Philistines.

Here again Abraham fell into sin through fear. Calling his wife his sister, Abimelech king of Gezar sent and took her; and she was about to become his wife. It seems that Sarah's health and beauty had been preserved in an extraordinary manner; and that she was still remarkable for her personal charms.

Or perhaps, as Abraham was a man of so much wealth and consequence, Abimelech might think it would be very good policy to gain his friendship by marrying his sister.

Before Sarah had become the wife of Abimelech, God appeared to him in a fearful dream; and threatened him with death if he did not restore to Abraham his wife. Abimelech replied, "Said he not unto me, She is my sister; and she herself said, He is my brother. In the integrity of my heart, and innocency of my hands, I have done this." God answered, "I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart, for I also withheld thee from sinning against me. Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live."

Abimelech arose with haste in the morning, and sent for Abraham, and said unto him, "What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee? that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin. What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing?" Abraham replied, "Because I thought surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake. And yet, in-

deed, she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother: and she became my wife." Abraham was altogether right about one thing. He thought where there was no *religion*, there was no *morality*. If the fear of God was not in a place, he justly concluded there was no regard to justice or mercy: the wisest of men in all ages have thought the same. The great Roman orator, Cicero, says: "*If piety toward the Supreme were once taken away, there would be an end of all fidelity; a dissolution of the bonds of society, and even of justice itself.*" The patriarch was, however, mistaken in forming so bad an opinion of Abimelech.

After Abraham and Abimelech had come to an understanding about the difficulty that had taken place, and Sarah had been restored to her husband, Abimelech made him large presents. He also told Abraham to dwell in any part of his kingdom where he chose. The patriarch accepted his generous offer, and continued to reside at Gezar.

CHAPTER X.

The faith of Abraham—We also are to believe—Sarah bears Abraham a son—He is solemnly dedicated to God—Address to the reader—A feast—Ishmael persecutes Isaac—He and his mother are sent away—Distress in the wilderness—Timely relief—Ishmael becomes an archer—He marries an Egyptian woman.

"Faith is the substance of our hopes,
Unseen by mortal eyes;
Faith is the key of prayer that opes
The treasures of the skies;
Faith is the dawn of heavenly light
That cheers the fainting soul,
And drives away those clouds of night
That round her vision roll."

ABRAHAM had long been called to walk by faith. Thirty-five years had passed since God promised him a son: and that the Saviour should come among his descendants. During all this time the promise remained unfulfilled. But Abraham still believed God: and hope, like a cooling fountain in a weary land, cheered and refreshed his soul. The happy year had now arrived when the long-promised child should be given. Sarah bore the patriarch a son; and, as God had commanded, he was named Isaac. This was in the year of the world two thousand one hundred and eight; and eighteen hundred and ninety-six years before the coming of Christ.

But the fulfilment of one part of the promise was God's pledge to Abraham that he would surely fulfil the other part. In his own good time God gave Isaac; and at just the right time he would give the Saviour. The birth of Isaac was put off thirty-five years after the promise was made: and this was done to teach Abraham a lesson of faith. After he had learned to trust in God for one thing, the same faith would lead him to trust in the same God for another. Now his soul was to be saved by trusting in the promised Saviour. This he did, and God gave him a title to heaven. Thus we see it was good for him to wait thirty-five years for the fulfilment of God's promise, that he might learn this lesson of faith.

You, my dear children, are as much in need of faith as was Abraham. Christ promises, that if you love and serve him, he will one day come and take you to himself. He says he will come in his glory, with all the holy angels, and that he will sit on the great white throne, and that all nations shall be gathered before him. Then the sea is to give up its dead, and the graves are to open; and small and great are to stand before him.

Then the book of his remembrance is to be opened, and all are to be judged out of the things written in the book. Then he declares he will welcome the righteous into the joy of their Lord; while the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment.

All these promises or sayings are to be received by faith. At present we do not see them fulfilled. We see no great white throne set in the heavens; and no Judge descending with his attendant angels. The graves do not now open before us; nor is the sea giving up its dead. We do not yet hear the startling sentence of the wicked, *Depart, ye cursed.* Neither do we hear the joyful welcome of the righteous, *Come, ye blessed.* Because these things do not now take place, the wicked disregard them: sometimes they even scoff at them, as the sinners of Sodom did at the warnings of Lot. But as the fires of heaven blazed forth all of a sudden upon that wicked city, so surely will impenitent sinners hear the voice of the *great Judge*, appointing them their portion where there is "*weeping and wailing*" for ever. And as the promise of God was fulfilled to Abraham, though he waited long for it; so those who believe and

obey God will one day "lift up their heads rejoicing, knowing that their redemption draweth nigh." The gates shall be lifted up, and the everlasting doors shall open, and the child of glory shall enter in. There he shall not need the light of the sun, nor the light of the moon; for the Lord God shall be his light and his joy, and the days of his mourning shall be ended.

On the eighth day after Isaac's birth, Abraham dedicated him to God by the ordinance of circumcision. The dedicating of a child to God is a very important matter. So God regarded it; and expressly commanded that all Abraham's sons, and sons' sons, should be solemnly dedicated to him in their infancy.

Baptism is now the ordinance by which children are dedicated to God. Perhaps most of my young readers have been baptized: this, my dear children, is a very solemn matter. Your parents gave you up to God in your infancy; and thus pledged themselves to train you up in his fear and love. They vowed to God for you, until you became old enough to take these vows upon yourselves. The time has come when you are old enough to do this. You are now called upon to fulfil these

solemn vows: to renounce sin and every thing that is displeasing to your Saviour; and to make a solemn dedication of your soul, your body, your life, your time, your talents, and yourself to God. Will you refuse to make that dedication? Will you withhold that heart from the Saviour which he gave his life to purchase? Will you refuse to love Him who loved you even unto death? Will you spend that life in sin which your parents solemnly pledged to God in your baptism? God forbid that you should be so wicked! O no, methinks I hear you say, "*Saviour, I will be thine*—

> 'Take my poor heart, and let it be
> For ever closed to all but thee.'"

The joy of Abraham and Sarah was very great, and they praised God for the child he had given them. When he was probably about three years old he was weaned; and this was made a joyful occasion. Abraham made a great feast; and smiling faces gathered around the festive board. Many rejoiced over that child, who was the wonder and the expectation of his day. But even this joyful day did not pass without interruption; for

Sarah saw Ishmael, the son of Hagar the Egyptian, mocking. Probably he pretended, that being the oldest son, he was heir to his father's estate; and therefore ridiculed the feast made in honour of Isaac as the heir. St. Paul says in the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians, that Ishmael *persecuted* Isaac; which some suppose means, that he was very tyrannical toward him. At all events, his conduct was such, that Sarah was unwilling to have him continue in the family. She insisted that he and his mother should be sent away. This was very afflictive to Abraham: he loved Ishmael with very tender affection, and knew not how to be separated from him.

But God saw what sort of people the descendants of Ishmael would be; and did not wish them to have any connection with those of Isaac. Ishmael was to be the father of a race of bold, roving, and warlike men; while Isaac's children would be a peaceable pastoral race, among whom the true religion would be preserved. For this reason, God said to Abraham, "Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac

shall thy seed be called. And also of the son of the bond-woman will I make a nation, because he *is* thy seed."

The patriarch was deeply distressed to be obliged to send away his son; but he knew that whatever God commanded was right. So he arose early in the morning, and gave Hagar a goat-skin bottle filled with water, and provisions for her journey, and sent her and her son away. Ishmael was at this time about seventeen years old.

They appear to have lost their way; and we are told that they "wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba." Here their water failed, and Ishmael became exhausted: his mother placed him under a shade to screen him from the burning heat, and went a little distance, that she might escape the pain of seeing him die. While she sat here and wept, God sent her relief. The angel of God called to Hagar, and said, "What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand, for I will make him a great nation." God then showed her a well which was not far off, and she filled her bottle and gave Ishmael to drink,

and he revived. They afterward fixed their residence in the wilderness of Paran. This is supposed to have been the region of country about mount Sinai. It is better watered and more fertile than any part of the country around it. Here Ishmael became an archer. With his bow and arrows he procured food for himself and his mother. When he arrived at a suitable age, his mother sought a wife for him in Egypt, her own native country. He continued, however, to live in the wilderness of Paran, and raised a family of twelve sons, who became chiefs of their families or tribes.

CHAPTER XI.

The king of Gerar makes a covenant of friendship with Abraham—The happy situation of the patriarch—A cloud comes oves his sunny sky—Journey to Moriah—Affecting scene—Strength of Abraham's faith—A son worthy of such a father—The angel of God appears for Isaac's deliverance, just as he is about to be sacrificed—The journey home—An instructive lesson.

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor standeth in the way of sinners;
Nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in his law doth he meditate day and night:
And he shall be like a tree, planted by the rivers of water,
That bringeth forth his fruit in his season.
His leaf also shall not wither,
And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

THIS is a pleasing picture of a godly man. Abraham was such a man, and the picture suits him most admirably. His friend, the king of Gerar, saw that Abraham was blessed of the Lord, and was anxious to make a covenant of perpetual friendship with him. He came to the patriarch, accompanied by Phichol, his chief captain, and said, "God is with thee in all that thou doest. Now, therefore, sware unto me here by God, that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son; but according to the

kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned."

Abraham consented to make this covenant of friendship with Abimelech: but there was one difficulty to be settled first. The servants of Abimelech had violently taken away one of the wells which Abraham had digged for the watering of his cattle. In some parts of Canaan, springs and brooks were scarce. The weather was very warm, and much water was necessary for the thirsty cattle. At the same time, to prepare suitable wells required considerable labour. Such wells were of course valuable. Abimelech declared his entire innocence concerning the well. His servants had seized upon it without his permission or knowledge. The well was restored to Abraham, and the king made a solemn league of friendship; after which they parted in peace.

"Blest are the sons of peace,
Whose hearts and hopes are one;
Whose kind designs to serve and please
Through all their actions run."

The next thing that Abraham did was to plant a grove, probably of oak trees. This seems to have been done chiefly for the pur-

poses of worship. The groves were God's first temples. Here God was worshipped in the midst of nature's own loveliness. But in after ages, these groves were corrupted to idolatrous purposes, and then God strictly forbade them; but while they were used only for a pure worship, they were agreeable places for the pleasing exercises of devotion. It is said that there in the grove which he had planted, Abraham called on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God.

Abraham had now a son, and one whom he had reason to love most tenderly. He was not only the child of his beloved Sarah, but unlike other children, he had been promised by God long before he was born. Thirty-five years Abraham had waited for him. Now he had been given, and the patriarch justly looked upon him as a precious gift from Heaven. With what interest did he contemplate his growing form and expanding mind!

"Strong was affection, ere the infant eye
Could look regard, or brighten in reply;
But when the cherub lip had learn'd to claim
A father's ear by that endearing name,
Soon as the playful innocent could prove
A tear of pity, or a smile of love,
Or conn'd his murmuring task beneath his care,
Or lisp'd with holy look his evening prayer,

Or gazing, mutely pensive, sat to hear
The hymn of evening warbled in his ear;
How fondly look'd admiring hope the while
At every artless tear, and every smile!
How glow'd the joyous parents to descry
A guileless bosom true to sympathy."

It was with him indeed a

"Delightful task, to rear the tender thought,
And teach the young idea how to shoot."

If Isaac was at any time sick, the father and mother were filled with tender anxiety. And when he recovered, when the rose of health bloomed again upon his cheek, and his eye was once more bright, how did they rejoice! In the mean time the lad "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." Abraham led him forth into the shady groves, and beside the fountains of water; and he talked to him about that great and good Being who had been his father's Protector and Guide all his life long. Isaac was a pleasant child. He was mild and thoughtful, very different from his bold and daring brother Ishmael.

Pleasantly and joyfully did the years pass away until Isaac was no longer a child, but a man and a companion. Now he could converse with his pious parents on the works and

ways of God: now he had learned the interesting history of his father's life, and that he was himself *the child of promise.* Blessed with such a son, and rich in both spiritual and temporal mercies, the sun of Abraham's life seemed quietly declining in a sky perfectly cloudless. He had passed through the more busy scenes of life; and a life, too, of much labour, both of body and mind. He had now come to that period when nature calls for repose, and through the blessing of God he had reason to expect it. Isaac was old enough to manage his property: he was as amiable as wise, and as good as a father could desire: and now what had Abraham to do, but to wait quietly for the call of God to depart to his rest in heaven! While all things are calm and delightful around him; and while life is gliding on like the gentle flow of a peaceful rivulet, the patriarch hears a voice calling, "Abraham!" It is the well known voice of that blessed Being who has so often spoken to him before; and he obediently answers, "Behold, here I am." The voice replies, "Take now thy son." By this time the patriarch is all attention. The voice proceeds—"Thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest."

This is beautiful language; how tenderly does it describe the feelings of one of the kindest of fathers for one of the best of sons. Such language is calculated to awaken the highest expectations; and Abraham is ready to inquire what new promise, what new token of divine love to this beloved son. But he waits to hear the conclusion of an address which had begun with so much promise. This is the conclusion, "*and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him up there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains that I will tell thee of.*"

What, offer up Isaac! the mild, affectionate, obedient Isaac; the child of his old age; the son of his beloved Sarah; the very child promised so long, and so often by God; *and offer him up as a burnt sacrifice!* How could Abraham do this? Why should God require it? And how would the patriarch answer for such an act to a wife and mother? Can his faith and obedience endure such a trial? Will he obey? Yes, he will. It is God that commands, and that is enough.

"And Abraham rose up early the next morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his

son: and clave the wood for a burnt offering," and journeyed toward the mount of which God had spoken. The place was distant; and it was not until the third day that the appointed mountain appeared in sight. When he beheld the fatal spot, did not nature struggle with faith, and his heart palpitate with strong emotion? Did not all the feelings of the father rise up within him, and plead against proceeding any farther? But faith conquers, and they proceed. At length they find themselves at the foot of the mountain. Here Abraham takes the wood from the beast, and lays it upon the shoulder of Isaac. They leave the two servants, and begin to ascend. And now comes a trial more severe than all the rest. In the simplicity of his heart, Isaac begins to inquire, "My father; and he said, Here am I, my son: and Isaac said, Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Could any thing be more tender than this? Could a dagger have pierced deeper into the patriarch's heart than these artless words? "The heart that does not feel this sentence is lost to sensibility. Every attempt to illustrate or enforce it would be as idle as an attempt to perfume the rose;

or paint the tulip into richer tints; or to burnish the sun into a brighter lustre." Abraham replied, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering."

After many weary steps, they at last find themselves at the place which God had pointed out. The secret must now be disclosed to Isaac. The sacrifice is not that of a gentle lamb, which can make no resistance, nor of a child ignorant of its situation. It is the sacrifice of a young and vigorous man, who, if not by entreaty, yet by speed or force, is able to deliver himself.

The sacred history is silent concerning the language which Abraham used in disclosing the secret which had so long struggled in his breast. And it is equally silent about the reply which Isaac made to such a startling disclosure. But we have no reason to doubt but that the son was worthy of the father; and that Isaac submitted as readily to be offered as Abraham did to offer him. We do not hear one word about his arguing, entreating, or resisting.

The altar is now built, Isaac is bound and laid upon it, and the fire is ready to light the pile. "And now, behold a sight from which

nature shrinks back, and stands confounded; a father lifting up his hand, armed with a deadly weapon, to slay his only son! But hark!—a voice—it is the same well known voice of God, calling, 'Abraham, Abraham!' The patriarch replies, 'Here am I.' Yes, indeed, there he was, performing one of the highest acts of obedience by which man ever showed his love to his God. The voice goes on: '*Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.*' O joyful tidings! Faith has triumphed, God approves, and Isaac lives; lives to be doubly dear to his father, and his father's God."

Abraham now turned: and behold, near him there was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns: "And Abraham went, and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering, instead of his son."

And Abraham called the name of that place *Jehovah-jireh*, which means, *The Lord shall be seen.*

"And the *angel of the Lord* called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and

said, By myself have I sworn, saith the *Lord*, that because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee; and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore: and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies: *and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.*"

The patriarch and his son now descended from the mount to return home. With what feelings they descended we can better imagine than describe. Was not their journey home a most joyful one? Did ever the sun appear to shine more beautifully, or the mountains and valleys, the streams, the birds, and the flowers appear more lovely? When they encamped for the night, and the starry heavens shed down their soft light upon them, how sweet was the sound of their evening prayer! And when they arrived at Beer-sheba and disclosed the wonderful story to Sarah, what tears of joy were shed; and how were their hearts melted with divine love!

I have now, my dear children, gone through with the *history* of this transaction: and I know you will agree with me in thinking it

to be among the most interesting events that ever did, or could take place. But I do not think you are satisfied with what has been said. You want to know more about it: you want to know if God has condescended in any way to let us see any of the *reasons* for such an unusual command as that which he gave to Abraham. Well now, my dear young friends, I shall endeavour to explain some of these reasons to you. But I must first remind you, that to understand reasons, requires effort of the mind. Now, if you *ask for reasons*, you must try *to reason yourselves. In the first place, then, this was a trial of Abraham's love to God.* You know, if we love God at all, we must love him supremely. We must love him more than any other object or being; and more than all other objects and beings together. The Saviour said, "If any man love father or mother, brother or sister, more than me, he is not worthy of me." You see that this is reasonable. There are, indeed, *two of the strongest reasons in the world for it.* In the first place, no being is so lovely as God. There is every thing *glorious, perfect, and adorable in him.* Do we admire wisdom? God is infinitely wise.

Do we admire power? God is all powerful. Do we admire holiness? God is the fountain and perfection of holiness: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty." Do we admire goodness? God is like an ocean of goodness.

"His glories blaze all nature round,
And strike the wondering sight,
Through skies, and seas, and solid ground,
With awe, and deep delight."

Thus, you see, to love God is to love perfection itself; and to refuse to love him would be to refuse our love to the very fountain of loveliness.

In the second place, we are to love God "because he first loved us." We ought to love him, because he is the author of our being. He made our curious and wonderful bodies, and our still more wonderful souls. He made this beautiful world in which we live, and fitted it up for our residence. We see his goodness in the light that shines upon us, in the food we eat, in the raiment we put on. We see it in the air we breathe, and in the health we enjoy.

"Thou art, O God, the light and life
Of all this wondrous world we see:
Its glow by day, its smile by night,
Are but reflections caught from thee.
Where'er we turn thy glories shine,
And all things bright and fair are thine."

"When youthful spring around us breathes,
Thy Spirit warms her fragrant sigh:
And every flower the summer wreathes,
Is born beneath thy kindling eye.
Where'er we turn, thy glories shine,
And all things fair and bright are thine."

But if in all these things we behold the goodness of our heavenly Father, how much more clearly do we see it in his mercy to us, as poor perishing guilty sinners.

"Here the mild glories of his grace
Our softer passions move;
Pity divine, in Jesus' face,
We see, adore, and love."

I hope, my dear children, you have followed me attentively thus far. I have been endeavouring to show you that it is reasonable to love God supremely. It is also reasonable for our good that our love should be *tried and proved.* Now this is just what God did to Abraham. The Bible says he tempted Abraham, or rather, as it should more properly read, he *tried* or *proved* him. Perhaps the patriarch was in danger of giving that affection to Isaac which was due to God only. If we love any thing, or any person so well as to let our affections cool toward God, or think of them when we should think of him, we

are doing wrong; and are in great danger. It is hard on this account to bear prosperity.

> "The fondness of a creature's love,
> How strong it strikes the sense."

For this reason God might call Abraham to give up Isaac. And the patriarch did really and truly give him up, as much as though he had actually died: and this, while it *tried* Abraham's love to God, *increased* it also. He came forth out of the trial with his affections more elevated and pure, and his soul more dead to the world, and more alive to God.

In the second place, it was a very profitable trial to the patriarch's FAITH. We need that faith in God which will enable us to trust in him in the darkest times; a faith that never fails, and never even *wavers*. Such a faith we are not likely to have without passing through a course of trial and discipline. A smooth sea never made a skilful navigator. The skilful mariner is one who has been nursed, as it were, on the bosom of the storm; one who has been tutored on the tops of the tempest-tossed waves. So the man of strong faith is generally one who has been

proved in the midst of trials and labours. Thus Abraham was tried. First he is called to leave his country, and go out he knows not where. Then he is tried by the famine, and thirty-five years he waits for God's promise to be fulfilled. Finally, when it is fulfilled, he is called to endure a trial more severe than all the rest—to give Isaac back to God. In this way God perfected his faith.

There is one thing my dear children, particularly worthy of our attention. Though the patriarch expected that Isaac would be slain, and his body consumed as a burnt offering, yet he did not expect God's promise of making him the father of a great nation would fail. He fully calculated, that though his body should be consumed, yet that God would raise him up, even from his ashes. We know this from two facts. First, St. Paul says, "*Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac—accounting, that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead.*" Secondly, When he left the two young men at the foot of the mountain, he said to them, "*I and the lad will go and come again.*"

Happy the person who has such a faith as that of Abraham!

"His son the father offer'd up,
Son of his age, his only son;
Object of all his joy and hope,
And less beloved than God alone."

"O for a faith like this, that we
The bright example may pursue;
May gladly give up all to THEE,
To whom our more than all is due."

I have one more reason to give you, my dear children, why, as I suppose, God commanded Abraham to offer up Isaac. You will remember that he had repeatedly promised that the patriarch should be the father of the promised Saviour; that this Saviour should come among his descendants; and that thus *all the nations of the earth should be blessed in him.* Now it seems that Abraham was very anxious to know *how* the redemption of mankind would be effected. He wanted to know *in what way* God would accomplish this great work. The clearest way in which God could make this known, would be by *significant action.* He accordingly chooses *to act out*, as it were, the whole scene of the Saviour's sufferings and death before Abraham.

First, he sends Abraham to the land of Moriah, to one of the mountains which he will show him. This is supposed to have

been the very mount Calvary where the Saviour was crucified. Abraham was probably taught that this was the place, and for that reason he called the mount *Jehovah-jireh, the Lord shall be seen:* that is, on this mount he shall be seen; here the Saviour shall make his appearance.

Secondly, In this transaction Isaac appears as a victim. Was he an *innocent* victim? So was the Saviour. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." Was Isaac a *mild, amiable, and lovely victim?* The Saviour was *infinitely more amiable and lovely.* Was Isaac a *voluntary* victim, one that fully consented to suffer? So was Jesus. When it was inquired, Who will go to redeem a fallen world? he replied, "Lo I come—I delight to do thy will, O God." Was Isaac the child of *prophecy* and *promise?* Jesus was heralded into the world by *a long line* of predictions and promises. Was Isaac the *joy and delight of his father?* Jesus was God's BELOVED SON, in whom he was well pleased. Did it manifest *great love* in God to give up such a son as Isaac? How great was the love of God to the world, who *so loved it* as to give his only begotten Son?

God had tens of thousands, who might be called his sons *by creation.* But he had no other like Jesus, who "*was in the beginning with God, and who was God:*" who possessed all the attributes and perfections of his Father; as much as Isaac was a perfect man, and possessed all the attributes and perfections of man like his father. I say God had only ONE SUCH SON: and as Abraham gave up Isaac, so God gave up his Son Jesus. Was Isaac to suffer a most *painful death*, to be offered up as a *bleeding sacrifice?* The Saviour did *actually suffer* and *expire* amid agonies the most dreadful when he died, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." Did Abraham *receive Isaac back again* as one that he had given up, and accounted already dead? So did God receive Jesus back again from under the dominion of death; and as Abraham rejoiced over Isaac when he took him from the altar, so God rejoiced over his well beloved Son when he had finished the work given him to perform, and risen triumphant over death and the grave.

From this we see, that God was pleased to make known to Abraham the *very manner*

in which he would provide salvation for a guilty world. It cost the patriarch and his son a trial. But the *privilege* was as great as the trial: so Abraham regarded it: he rejoiced over it as the crowning mercy of his life. The Saviour said when he was on earth, "*Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad.*"

I must add one thing more, which, though the last, is not the least important. It is, that this whole transaction was as much *for our profit* as it was for Abraham's. It teaches a lesson for our faith and love, and illustrates the amazing condescension of God in giving up the Son of his love to suffer and die for us, poor, guilty, perishing sinners. If the offering up of Isaac affects us to tenderness, and even to tears, how should we feel when we think of the offering up of Jesus? O! that heart must be fearfully hard and wicked which is not melted at such love, and such mercy as God manifested when he spared not his OWN SON, but gave him up freely for us. "*Herein is love, not that we [first] loved God, but that he loved us:*" *with pity the most generous, and compassion the most tender and melting.*

CHAPTER XIII.

Twelve years of peace and prosperity—Death of Sarah—Abraham purchases the cave of Machpelah—A beautiful picture of primitive politeness appears in the purchase—The first money-transaction recorded in history.

Friend after friend departs,
  Who hath not lost a friend?
There is no union here of hearts
  That finds not here an end.
Were this frail world our final rest,
Living or dying none were blest.

Beyond the flight of time—
  Beyond the reign of death—
There surely is some blessed clime,
  Where life is not a breath,
Nor life's affections transient fire,
Whose sparks fly upward and expire.

There is a world above
  Where parting is unknown;
A long eternity of love,
  Form'd for the good alone.
And faith beholds the dying here
Translated to that glorious sphere.

Thus star by star declines,
  Till all are past away;
As morning high, and higher shines,
  To pure and perfect day.
Nor sink those stars in empty night,
But hide themselves in heaven's own light.

MONTGOMERY.

WE have seen in the last chapter, that Abraham was called to pass through a severe but instructive and profitable trial. He came

out of it as gold comes out of the crucible, purified, but not consumed. With a firmer faith, and affections more elevated and pure, he was better fitted for either this world or the next: and was in less danger of being drawn away by temporal prosperity from his steadfast love to God. As storms and tempests purify the air, and are generally followed by delightful calms—as after these storms have passed, the sun comes forth more bright and beautiful, and the fields are clothed with robes of richer green, and the flowers send up fresh clouds of perfume: so after this stormy trial was past, the life of the patriarch seemed more bright and beautiful than ever. Twelve happy years glided away, in which we hear of nothing to disturb his peace. It is true, time was busy in burnishing his locks, and those of his beloved Sarah, with some silvery tints; and it had planted now and then a wrinkle on that fair face on which the patriarch had so often gazed with such intense delight. But the old age of Abraham and Sarah was not one of gloom and peevish moroseness. It was a sunny old age, which, like autumn, was rich in mellow fruits. In the company of their beloved Isaac, this peaceful

old age was passing quietly along. Their family was a picture of piety and content. But this life is, after all, only a journey to the tomb. The time at length arrived, when Abraham must again be reminded that this world was not his home. He had long lived with the wife of his youth: their attachment to each other had been tender and lasting; and well it might be, for they had found in each other a rare assemblage of excellences. But death breaks the most tender ties; and makes no distinction in favour of even the most virtuous. It now entered the sanctuary of Abraham's family, and summoned the partner of his joys, and comforter of his pilgrimage, to her final rest. The Bible does not give a description of the closing scene; but we have no reason to doubt that her exit was calm, and her end peace. We picture to ourselves the end of one who, lovely to the last,

> "Now sunk by slow degrees away,
> So calmly from her sorrows borne,
> 'Twas like the opening blush of day
> So softly spread we scarce can say
> Which is the twilight, which the morn."

Abraham felt the stroke, and though he did not murmur, still he wept. Tears were

due to the memory of such a wife. Yet the patriarch did not sorrow as those without hope He knew that the *earthly* Canaan was not their home: and that Sarah had only gone a little before him to the enjoyments of the *heavenly* Canaan.

> "Say, what is death? 'tis life's last shore,
> Where vanities are vain no more;
> Where all pursuits their goal obtain,
> And life is all retouch'd again."

The Bible gives us a very particular account of Sarah's funeral. It is an account full of interest, a delightful record of the simplicity and politeness of ancient times. Abraham appears in this transaction as a man of a truly noble soul, adorned with the most "amiable and respectable virtues." "And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying, I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight. And the children of Heth answered Abraham, saying unto him, Hear us, my lord: thou *art* a mighty prince among us; in the choice of our sepulchres bury thy dead: none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulchre, but

that thou mayest bury thy dead. And Abraham stood up, and bowed himself to the people of the land, *even* to the children of Heth. And he communed with them, saying, If it be your mind that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and entreat for me to Ephron the son of Zohar, that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he hath, which is in the end of his field: for as much money as it is worth he shall give it me, for a possession of a burying-place among you. And Ephron dwelt among the children of Heth. And Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the audience of the children of Heth, *even* of all that went in at the gate of his city, saying, Nay, my lord, hear me: the field give I thee, and the cave that *is* therein, I give it thee: in the presence of the sons of my people give I it thee: bury thy dead. And Abraham bowed down himself before the people of the land. And he spake unto Ephron, in the audience of the people of the land, saying, But if thou *wilt give it*, I pray thee, hear me: I will give thee money for the field; take *it* of me, and I will bury my dead there. And Ephron answered Abraham, saying unto him, My lord, hearken unto me: the land *is*

worth four hundred shekels of silver; what *is* that betwixt me and thee? bury therefore thy dead. And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the au dience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current *money* with the merchant. And the field of Ephron, which *was* in Machpelah, which *was* before Mamre, the field, and the cave which *was* therein, and all the trees that *were* in the field, that *were* in all the borders round about, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession, in the presence of the children of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of his city. And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre: the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan."

In the above account we see the tender and affectionate husband. He wishes to honour in death the remains of the woman whom he had loved and prized in life. But he is too noble-minded, generous, and independent to show respect to the memory of Sarah with that which costs him nothing. The courtesy of his neighbours he repays with true affability

and politeness, and is strictly honest and just: he will give the full value for the field, which was freely offered him as a gift. After the favourite spot is secured by fair and honourable purchase, then Abraham buries his dead.*

"It is worthy of observation that this is the first *money*-transaction which we read of in the world. Till then, and long after, both among the posterity of Abraham and other nations, a man's wealth was estimated by the number and quality of his cattle: and cattle were the principal instruments of commerce. Thus we read, in the writings of Homer, of a coat of mail worth a *hundred oxen*, a caldron worth *twenty sheep*, a cup or goblet worth *twelve lambs*, and the like. The words belonging to commerce or exchange of property in the Greek language are mostly derived from the names of certain animals; by means of which the exchange was originally carried on. Thus the word which signifies to *traffic* or *commute* one kind of goods for another, is derived from that which signifies *a lamb*. The word which is translated *to sell*, comes from one which signifies *a colt* or a *young horse*. The Greek term which denotes *revenue* or

* Hunter.

rent, and that which signifies *a sheep*, are of like import. A criminal, according to the magnitude of his crime, was compelled to pay a fine of four, twelve, or a hundred oxen. A *wealthy person* was called a man of *many lambs*.

"But as early as the times of Abraham, it had been discovered that silver was a more convenient article for traffic, and all civilized nations have finally made silver and gold the principal article by which business is transacted." * Happy, happy indeed, would the world be, if men were only as well agreed in imitating the piety and *heavenly wisdom* of Abraham as they are in imitating his *worldly wisdom*.

*Hunter.

CHAPTER XIV.

The patriarch desires to see his son settled in life—Unusual advantages for forming a matrimonial connection—Importance of the measure—Abraham's opinions on the subject—Sends to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor, a pious and judicious messenger—An interview at a well—A discreet, beautiful, and modest young lady, named Rebekah, granddaughter of Nahor, agrees to accompany the messenger—They return, and Rebekah becomes the wife of Isaac—A happy family.

About three years after the death of Sarah, we find Abraham beginning to make arrangements for having Isaac settled in life. He wishes to see him married and fixed in a home of his own. And how does he proceed in this matter? We must remember that Abraham is very wealthy, and highly respected in all the country where he lives. The people of Heth consider him "a mighty prince among them;" and we have seen that the king of Gerar esteemed him so highly that he came with Phichol his chief captain to make a covenant of friendship with him. The king of Egypt had also made him large presents, and the king of Sodom: and King Melchizedek went out to meet him and do him honour. We may conclude, then, that the princes of the land would esteem it no small privilege

to have their daughters form a matrimonial connection with his family. It is reasonable, too, to suppose, that Isaac was a man of no mean personal appearance. Josephus, the Jewish historian, represents him as a man of remarkable beauty. Probably this fact had come down to him by tradition. But there are other reasons which would lead to such a conclusion. Abraham and Isaac were both intellectual men, and an intellectual countenance is not often a disagreeable one. Besides, Isaac was the son of the beautiful Sarah. His beauty, however, is a matter of no great consequence, except that it would be one among other things which would enable his father to choose a wife for him almost anywhere he pleased.

With all these advantages what course did the father and son pursue in this matter? Its importance was great beyond what I can describe. Isaac was to be the father of a great nation, and a nation chosen by God to preserve the true religion. It was to be a nation among whom God would raise up prophets to declare his will, and foretell future events —a nation to whom God would commit the INSPIRED HISTORY OF THE WORLD: and

to whom he would intrust those *written revelations* of his will which are now formed into one book, and called THE BIBLE. It was to be a nation among whom the SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD would make his appearance.

Now, if Isaac had married only for wealth or beauty, he might have introduced some captivating and ensnaring idolator into the family of Abraham; by whom his heart might have been turned away from God, as King Solomon's heart was turned away by his idolatrous wives. And then his children, instead of being trained up in the worship of the true God, might have been initiated into the senseless and corrupting worship of dumb idols.

Abraham understood all this. He was not like those parents who are willing to sell the *eternal interests of their children's souls*, and are glad to marry them into a heathen, an infidel, or into an irreligious family, provided they can only get *money*, or what *they call honour*, by the match. "With them the most valuable accomplishments of body and mind go for nothing, unless they are set off with gold." They *literally marry* their *sons and daughters* to so many *pounds and*

shillings, or so many *dollars and cents.* Neither the patriarch nor his son was willing to form any connection with the idolatrous Canaanites—no, nor with those who were not idolatrous: for even among these the true religion appears to have been fast vanishing away; and wickedness every year increasing. Virtue and religion, were with Abraham and Isaac the first, and chief objects of regard.

We must recollect that Abraham had left his brother Nahor at Haran, in Mesopotamia. Nahor was a worshipper of the true God, and had trained up his children in the true religion. It was among this brother's children that Abraham now determined to seek a wife for his son. But the patriarch did not wish to go to Mesopotamia himself, nor to send Isaac there. Providence had, however, provided him with the means of sending by another. He had in his family an old, faithful and intelligent servant, worthy of being trusted anywhere. He had the chief management of Abraham's princely estate: and conducted himself so well that he was allowed to control it almost at pleasure. His name was Eliezer. Abraham called him, and requested him to bind himself by an oath that

he would obey the directions he was about to give him. These were, that he would not take a wife unto Isaac of the daughters of the Canaanites. "But," said Abraham, "thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac. And the servant said unto him, Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest? And Abraham said unto him, Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again. The LORD God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land, he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence. And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again." To this Eliezer agreed, and took the oath according to the patriarch's wishes.

The faithful servant now prepared immediately for his journey to Mesopotamia. He took ten camels and suitable presents, and

with a number of his fellow-servants departed. They appear to have had a prosperous and speedy journey, and in a few days found themselves near the city where the descendants of Nahor resided.

The people in eastern countries frequently had their wells a little outside of their cities. Accordingly, Eliezer and his company halted by the well belonging to the city of Nahor. Here they alighted, and caused their weary camels to lie down and rest: Eliezer knew that it was the custom of the young maidens to come out to the wells at evening to draw water, and as the day was now drawing to a close he expected some of them would soon make their appearance.

He was a pious man, and looked to Providence for his guide. Lifting up his heart in prayer, he said: "O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee send me good speed this day: and show kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand *here* by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: and let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink;

and I will give thy camels drink also; *let the same be* she *that* thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast showed kindness unto my master."

This prayer shows not only the piety, but also the discretion of Eliezer. He does not know which among the fair daughters of his master's relatives might make a suitable companion for Isaac. But God knows; and it is an easy matter for him to direct; so he asks for a sign. At the same time his good sense leads him to ask for such a sign as is natural, and manifests humanity, condescension, and those other amiable qualities which promise a discreet and virtuous wife. Before the good man finished his prayer, a damsel made her appearance. Her name was Rebekah. She was a daughter of Bethuel, a son of Nahor, and was young and beautiful. She went down into the well, which was probably large, and furnished with a circular stairway made of masonry work, and, having filled her pitcher, came up. Eliezer stepped forward to meet her, and requested her to give him a drink of water. She replied, "Drink, my lord, and I will draw for thy camels also." This she did, while Eliezer stood wondering

at her simplicity of manners, her innocence and kindness. When she had done, he inquired, "Whose daughter art thou? tell me, I pray thee: is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in?" She replied that she was the daughter of Bethuel, and granddaughter of Nahor, and added, that they had accommodations, both for him, his men, and his camels. Eliezer immediately bowed to Rebekah in token of his gratitude for her kindness, and then prostrated himself before God, and said: "Blessed *be* the LORD God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: I *being* in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren." He also presented Rebekah with some valuable presents, and "she ran and told them of her mother's house these things."

"And Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban, and he ran out unto the man at the well, and said, Come in, thou blessed of the LORD; wherefore standest thou without? for I have prepared the house, and room for the camels. And the man came into the house: and he ungirded his camels, and gave straw and provender for the camels, and wa-

ter to wash his feet, and the men's feet that *were* with him. And there was set *meat* before him to eat: but he said, I will not eat until I have told mine errand. And he said, Speak on. And he said, I *am* Abraham's servant. And the Lord hath blessed my master greatly, and he is become great: and he hath given him flocks and herds, and silver and gold, and men-servants, and maid-servants, and camels, and asses. And Sarah, my master's wife, bare a son to my master when she was old; and unto him hath he given all that he hath. And my master made me swear, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife to my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell: but thou shalt go unto my father's house, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son. And I said unto my master, Peradventure the woman will not follow me? And he said unto me, The Lord, before whom I walk, will send his angel with thee, and prosper thy way; and thou shalt take a wife for my son of my kindred, and of my father's house. Then shalt thou be clear from *this* my oath when thou comest to my kindred; and if they give not thee *one*, thou shalt be clear from my oath.

And I came this day unto the well, and said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, if now thou do prosper my way which I go: behold, I stand by the well of water; and it shall come to pass, that when the virgin cometh forth to draw *water*, and I say to her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water of thy pitcher to drink; and she say unto me, Both drink thou, and I will also draw for thy camels: *let* the same *be* the woman whom the LORD hath appointed out for my master's son. And before I had done speaking in mine heart, Behold, Rebekah came forth with her pitcher on her shoulder; and she went down unto the well, and drew *water;* and I said unto her, Let me drink, I pray thee. And she made haste, and let down her pitcher from her *shoulder*, and said, Drink; and I will give thy camels drink also: so I drank, and she made the camels drink also. And I asked her and said, Whose daughter art thou? And she said, The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son. And I bowed down my head, and worshipped the Lord, and blessed the Lord God of my master Abraham, which had led me in the right way, to take my master's brother's daughter unto his son. And now, if ye will deal kindly and

truly with my master, tell me: and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand, or to the left. Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from the Lord; we cannot speak unto thee bad or good. Behold, Rebekah *is* before thee, take *her*, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the Lord hath spoken. And it came to pass, that, when Abraham's servant heard their words, he worshipped the Lord, *bowing himself* to the earth."

According to the customs of those days, Eliezer now presented gold and raiment, with other valuable articles, to Rebekah and her relatives. "And they did eat and drink, he and the men that *were* with him, and tarried all night: and they rose up in the morning; and he said, Send me away unto my master. And her brother and her mother said, Let the damsel abide with us *a few* days, at the least ten; after that she shall go. And he said unto them, Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master. And they said, We will call the damsel, and inquire at her mouth. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said,

I will go." They then blessed Rebekah, and she departed, accompanied by a respectable female, who had been her nurse in infancy, and now went to be a sort of second mother to her. She had also other female attendants. "And Rebekah arose, and her damsels, and they rode upon the camels, and followed the man; and the servant took Rebekah, and went his way. And Isaac came from the way of the well Lahai-roi: for he dwelt in the south country. And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the even-tide; and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels *were* coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes; and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel: for she *had* said unto the servant, What man is that walketh in the field to meet us? and the servant *had* said, It is my master: therefore she took a vail, and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done. And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's *death*."

Thus ends this beautiful picture of early times and manners. Isaac had been a dutiful

and loving son; he now became a kind and affectionate husband. In Rebekah we see the qualities most engaging in one of her age, and sex. She was gentle, courteous, modest, condescending, and discreet Above all, both were worshippers of the true God. Rebekah was introduced into a habitation that had already become vocal with the sound of prayer and the songs of praise. What may not be hoped from a family where religion is the chief concern, and begins, and ends the day. "The blessing of the Lord is in the habitation of the righteous."

CHAPTER XV.

Abraham marries again, and has six sons, to whom he gives gifts, and sends them into Arabia and Syria to settle —The patriarch dies—Isaac and Ishmael bury him in the cave of Machpelah—His character—Abraham a blessing to the world.

Abraham now saw his son settled to his entire satisfaction, and he felt released from his greatest earthly anxiety. Though a hundred and forty years old, he had not lost his strength or vigour. God had preserved both in a remarkable manner. Having been accustomed for so many years to a married life,

he doubtless felt the need of some one to cheer the loneliness of his habitation. He accordingly married a second wife, whose name was Keturah; and by whom he had six sons. Their names were Zimram, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. To prevent strife after his death, he made an entire settlement of his affairs during his life. He knew that property is the great source of contention among brethren, and as every prudent man should do, he made his will, and left no room for misunderstanding. To Isaac, the son of his first and principal wife, he left the greatest part of his property. To the others "*he gave gifts*," probably enough to start them comfortably in life. Most likely they were cattle, seed for sowing the land, and instruments for tilling it. That Isaac might not be disturbed by any envy, jealousy, or ambition that might arise among them, and that the intentions of Providence might be fulfilled in giving the land of Canaan to his descendants, Abraham sent them away eastward to settle themselves during his lifetime. There they became the heads or chiefs of populous tribes.

Sooner or later all must die. The most vigorous health must finally give way. So

it was in the case of Abraham: he at length found himself an old man, full of days and ripe for the tomb. His temperate habits, his constant exercise in the open air, his cheerful disposition, and, above all, the special blessing of God preserved him a long time. But the period had finally come so affectingly described in the following beautiful lines:—

"Days of my youth—ye have glided away,
Hairs of my youth—ye are frosted and gray,
Eyes of my youth—your keen sight is no more,
Cheeks of my youth—ye are furrow'd all o'er,
Strength of my youth—all your vigour is gone,
Thoughts of my youth—your gay visions are flown."

But the patriarch could also add to the preceding—

"Days of my youth—I wish not your recall,
Hairs of my youth—I 'm content ye should fall,
Joys of my age! in true wisdom delight,
Eyes of my age! be religion your light,
Thoughts of my age! dread ye not the cold sod,
Hopes of my age! be ye fix'd on your God."

Yes, blissful visions of immortality lighted up a smile of joy on the patriarch's brow, and he daily waited the call of his Lord. He did not now wait long. The summons came.

"The weary wheels of life stood still at last."

He heard the voice of his Master saying, "Come up higher." The sacred history says,

"He yielded up his spirit, and died in a good old age, an old man, full of years, and was gathered to his people." On this affecting occasion we find Isaac and Ishmael uniting their friendly sorrows over their father's grave. The body of the good man was doubtless followed by a long train of sincere mourners, who felt that they had lost a friend and a benefactor: one who had been to them rather a *father* than a *master*. It was deposited in the cave of Machpelah by the side of Sarah, there to await the resurrection of the just.

In the whole life of Abraham the Bible records but one or two faults. This is remarkable in a book which is always so impartial; and this one fact sets the patriarch's character in a most exalted light. But Abraham's virtue was not barely negative. It did not consist in merely doing no harm. It was virtue of the most active and exalted kind. His whole life was one of usefulness, and he has left the world a shining example of true excellence. Do my friends wish to know the secret of this rare virtue? It was simply governing his whole life by two plain principles, FAITH AND OBEDIENCE.

This great man always believed what God

had said. He believed without wavering, and believed with such a faith that one word of direction or promise was worth a thousand reasonings or disputings. But his *obedience* was equal to his faith. It was cheerful and prompt. As soon as he hears the voice of God, he is ready for his work. Not a moment is lost. No difficulty is too great to encounter, no danger too great to face, and no object too dear to give up. He believes with a firm and strong faith. He obeys with a cheerful, prompt, loving obedience. Such was the character and conduct of Abraham. His life was the glory of his age, and his example is a rich legacy to the church of God in all ages. "THE MEMORY OF THE JUST IS BLESSED."

In passing through the life of Abraham I have had occasion to notice Ishmael. But as the notice was very brief, I think my young readers would like to hear something of that very extraordinary man. If we turn to the sixteenth and seventeenth chapters of Genesis, we shall find several very interesting predictions concerning Ishmael and his descendants.

First, He was to be the father of twelve princes, or chiefs of tribes. Gen. xvii, 20. Secondly, His descendants were to multiply

exceedingly, and become a great nation, verse 20. Thirdly, He and his descendants were to be wild men. Gen. xvi, 12. Fourthly, Their hand was to be against every man, and every man's hand against them, verse 12. Fifthly, They were, notwithstanding their hostility to all their neighbours, to continue unsubdued; they were to dwell in the presence of their brethren, verse 12.

You can see at once, my dear children, that none but God could know what would become of Ishmael. All except his being the father of twelve princes was told to his mother before his birth: and that fact was made known to Abraham when Ishmael was not more than twelve years old. Now, who can tell whether a child will live, and attain to manhood, or die in his younger years? If he lives to grow up, who knows whether he will be the father of a family of children, or in that event, that the children will be just twelve, and all sons; and that these twelve sons will all live to be men, and become princes or chiefs? Certainly none but God could foretel such events, or some one to whom God should reveal them. If, then, these predictions were fulfilled, they are so many proofs

of the truth of that Bible in which they are recorded. They are so many proofs, that God is the author of the Bible, and that we are to receive it and obey it as HIS WORD.

Now let us see if these predictions were fulfilled. The first I have named was, that Ishmael was to be the father of twelve princes, or chiefs of tribes. This circumstance, particular as it was, was exactly fulfilled. Ishmael went and dwelt in the desert of Paran. This was a thinly inhabited country around mount Sinai, and not far from Egypt. He married an Egyptian woman, and had twelve sons. Moses has given us even their names. They were Nebajoth, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Kadar, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. "These," says the sacred history, "are the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names, by their towns, and by their castles, twelve princes according to their nations." It is a singular and interesting fact, that to this day, the descendants of Ishmael, under the name of Arabians or Arabs, live in tribes, and are governed by princes or chiefs.

Secondly, His descendants were to multiply exceedingly, and become a great nation.

It was but a short period after Ishmael had

settled in Paran, before his descendants had multiplied and become so numerous that they were found carrying on trade with Egypt. Joseph was sold by his brethren to a company of Ishmaelite merchants. Afterward they multiplied into large tribes, and were known under the name of Hagarenes, Nabotheans, Itureans, and especially Scenites, and Saracens. They generally continued a free and prosperous people until the time of Mohammed, their famous leader, and pretended prophet, who laid the foundations for a mighty empire. After this, they became one of the most powerful nations, and extended their dominions over some of the best and fairest portions of the old world. Even the Romans, those great conquerors, did not subdue so many nations in so short a time as did these fierce descendants of Ishmael. They were finally driven back, and reduced within their former limits, where, under the name of Arabs, they are still a numerous people.

Thirdly, Ishmael was to be a wild man. This prediction related to his descendants as much as to himself.

Though he was born among a race of quiet shepherds, yet we are told he became an

archer. He seems to have preferred the wild, daring, and romantic life of hunting, to the more mild and peaceful one followed by his fathers; and thus the prophecy was fulfilled as to himself. But the description proved much more applicable to his descendants than to him. They are to this day a people wild in their looks and manners, and fierce and savage in their dispositions. They are found ranging the deserts, and are not easily softened and tamed to society. The same wilderness where Ishmael lived by his bow is still inhabited by his wild descendants. Many of them neither sow nor plant, but spend their lives in roaming over the desert.

Fourthly, It was predicted that their hand would be against every man, and every man's hand against them.

One of these things is the natural consequence of the other. If their hand is against every man, every man will regard them with suspicion or enmity, or with both. The Arabs have been a race of robbers by land, and pirates by sea. They have been enemies to other nations, and other nations have been enemies to them. Even now, nearly four thousand years after the prediction was utter-

ed, travellers passing through their country are obliged to go in large caravans, armed and guarded, or rather in little armies; and watch and ward must be kept night and day, to escape these wild robbers, who go about in troops for plunder.

Fifthly, Notwithstanding their hostile character they were to remain a free and unconquered people, dwelling in the prescence of their brethren.

This was a very extraordinary prediction. There never was any other nation that existed so long in a state of hostility to all its neighbours. General hostility has provoked general hatred, and led in all other instances to subjection. But the descendants of Ishmael have dwelt in the presence of their brethren for nearly four thousand years, without ever as a nation being subdued. They have been attacked by some of the most mighty conquerors, at the head of the most powerful armies. Sesostris, Cyrus, Alexander the Great, and the Romans, have all made war upon them in turn. They have gained some temporary advantages over them, but the body of the nation has remained free. Mr. Gibbon, a historian very unfriendly to the Bible, is

obliged to confess this fact. His own words are, "*The body of the nation has escaped the yoke of the most powerful monarchies.*" "When they advance to battle," says he, "the hope of victory is in the front, and in the rear, the assurance of retreat. Their horses and camels, which in eight or ten days can perform a march of four or five hundred miles, disappear before the conqueror: the secret waters of the desert elude his search, and his victorious troops are consumed with thirst, hunger, and fatigue, in pursuit of an invisible foe, who scorns his efforts, and safely reposes in the heart of the burning solitude."

Thus we see the descendants of Ishmael stand at this day as a living monument of the truth of the Bible; assuring us, that the "holy men of old, who wrote it, spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

THE END.